Mount Voices

Archives
MSMC

Spring 1999 **Volume III**

A Journal of

Poetry, Fiction and Non-Fiction

Mount St. Mary's College

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A Publication of Mount St. Mary's College
12001 Chalon Road, Los Angeles,
California 90049

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A publication of
Mount St. Mary's College

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Printing by Collegiate Press Company,
MSMC Graphics, 12001 Chalon Road, Los Angeles, California 90049
(310) 954-4070

Cover art by Cynthia Vega. Title pages designed by Amanda Prince.
Layout by Summer Cervantez.

A special thanks to Sister Mary Williams
and Dr. Jane Lingua for their help and support.

Founded in 1996, *Mount Voices* is published once a year at Mount St. Mary's College, 12001 Chalon Road, Los Angeles, CA 90049. *Mount Voices* features the work of Mount St. Mary's undergraduates, non-traditional students, alumnae, faculty, staff, and administrators, as well as writers from across the nation. All works belong to individual authors. No works may be reprinted without the permission of the individual authors. For current submission policies, please send a query with a self-addressed envelope to Marcos McPeek Villatoro, English Department.

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Foreword

In 1956 Mount St. Mary's College published a small, clothbound book entitled *Early Rain.* It was a collection of poetry, short stories, essays and criticism written by the Mount's students, many of which had won awards as prestigious as the Atlantic Monthly Contest and the Robert Browning Poetry Contest. Though over forty years have passed, many of the themes are familiar. Theresa Hatsumi wrote about a unique homesickness in her personal essay ". . .Ere I had Told Ten Birthdays." In it she looks out a window (perhaps from her dorm room?) over the blue California sky, trying to enjoy the splendid panoramic view of Los Angeles and the Pacific after a rain, only to have her thoughts drift. ". . .Between these passing moments of quietness, solitude, and the undying melody of sadness in the rain, I sit and think of my home far away in the Orient." Shirley Burke wrote in verse about the ongoing struggles of women in a sexist society, yet knowing that she does in fact have a certain, silent power,

> How can I bear the teasing jokes and scorn
> That mock my fragile strength and female wants,
> Forgetting he was once a mother's thorn?
>
> . . . .a simple stare
> Betrays the tender words I want to know.
> Another brawny male is now in tow.
>
> From "A Lover Scorns his Love Yet In Reality
> She Hath Him Captivity"

It is a handsome, well-bound book, its pages now yellowed with four decades. It sits on my desk, a touchstone to others' memories. As a professor of creative writing, I can't help but notice the book's voices, ones that are finding themselves through the discipline of a short story, the rigor of a poem. They were learning how strong emotion must meet the cruel demands of writing in order to give birth to art.

Early Rain gave birth to *Westwords*, a small literary magazine put together by the Mount's students, one which began in the late 1950's and continued through the sixties and seventies. As is the case with many literary publications (take, for example, the rise, demise, and rebirth of *Story Magazine*), *Westwords* came to its end somewhere in the late sev-

enties. It was not until the mid nineties that another group of students gathered to create a magazine, this time calling it Mount Voices. This volume builds upon that history.

In 1998 the Mount inaugurated the Fletcher Jones Endowed Chair in Writing. The charge of the chair-holder was to continue in his/her writing production (be it poetry, nonfiction, fiction, or all of the genres), teach classes in creative writing and literature, begin a Visiting Writers' Series, and advise the staff of *Mount Voices*. One hope was that the chair-holder would also be connected with the national (and, if possible, international) writing community. Through the endowment the Mount could invite visiting writers to our campus so that the students came in touch with individuals who participate in the ongoing development of the American literary canon. This would help promote the growth and development of a creative writing and reading community at the Mount.

We are now in the beginning stages of that development. *Mount Voices* plays a significant role in bringing our students and faculty closer to the publishing world. In this volume, we opened the submissions to the outside. Writers from all over the country as well as those inside the Mount submitted their essays, poetry, and fiction. In this way, our students, most of whom may be new to the literary world, yet who have taken the step into Rilke's necessary solitude in order to write, can be published alongside other writers throughout the country who have made some steps into the literary marketplace. The very mix can help draw Mount St. Mary's College into the writing world, as well as invite others into the world of our college community.

The voices of our students make up the heart of this anthology. While we build upon the history of *Early Rain* and *Westwords*, the voices from the Mount, as seen here, have their own uniqueness. Some poems are written in Spanish, and some of those Spanish poems may or may not have an English translation. Both forms are appropriate in a time when Spanish is quickly becoming more common, an ordinary weave in the American tapestry. The writings come from various ethnic perspectives-African American, white, Latino, Asian American. In a time when the jury is still out (and may remain so) on which type of poetry is "fashionable," the poems use various forms, from free verse to new formalism. They lean into every sentiment—meditative, rebellious, sensual, humorous, enraged, alone.

Yet perhaps one thing that has not changed is the desire, or the need, to write-to find through the very act of placing words on paper, one's self. One of the pitfalls of an established writer is that she may become comfortable in her style, her way of telling a tale. If she goes unchallenged,

she becomes a machine of her own words and work. Comfort for a writer is the worst of hells, made even colder for the writer's acquiescence to that very hell. Most of the voices in *Mount Voices* are new, young, thus they may be more daring, more unafraid to make a mistake. While the old writer is a mentor to the apprentice poet, the young poet is a blessing to the mentor's need to stay fresh by seeing the world, over and again, anew.

We hope for great things with this issue, the most important being the opportunity that our students may have to express themselves through the written word. As the years pass, we hope this publication will be recognized in larger circles, beyond our campuses. Our college has great vision concerning the personal and professional successes of our students, so it is natural that we wish the same for those students among us who wish to write. A few of them may have voices, cultivated here at the Mount, that will later join in the ongoing development of the American literary canon. In my short time here, teaching creative writing classes, I have seen that not only is such a dream possible, but inevitable.

Marcos McPeek Villatoro

Poetry

El llanto del que no pudo llorar

Yo lloro por esos
Que no se les permitió llorar,
que se tragaron sus lágrimas
para poder a sus seres queridos salvar.
Déjenme por favor mis lágrimas derramar
y sentir por aquellos
que ningún chillido pudieron sacar.
Se fueron a sus tumbas
con un nudo de dolor
que ni los que sufren ahora
sabrán comparar el llanto amargo
que en sus almas quedó.

Visita de muerte

Tocaste a mi puerta hace tres noches.
Venías cubierto como la oscuridad del carbón.
Tu capa de seda y tus huesos sin la suavidad de la piel.
Lloré porque presentía que me querías llevar.
Te supliqué de rodillas
Por favor no me lleves
Pero me calmaste con el fervor de tu voz.
No te asustes
No te voy a llevar
Solamente te vengo a visitar
Aun falta mucho
para que nos volvamos a encontrar

Siento una cierta soledad

Camino por un jardín.
Todo lo que veo es sombra
contra el suelo gris.
Las flores me rodean.
Son rojas como la sangre
de mis venas.
Pero hay una en medio
bien distinta.
Es de un blanco pálido
Y da inicio a marchitarse.
Brota su tristeza porque
no hay nada igual.

I Feel a Certain Solitude

Walking through a garden
I see only my shadow
against a gray ground.
The flowers surround me,
Red like the blood running
through my veins.
The one in the middle is different.
Pale white
With initiations of withering.
Its sadness blooms
for none are like her.

Spoken For

The Mona Lisa in blackface
spilled
diamonds from
her mouth when
she opened it
to speak to, perhaps,
defend herself.
Perhaps she
wanted to breathe
deeply and found
she couldn't.
Perhaps
it was nothing
more.

Taking the Brim

The bathwater in
the tub that
always brims over even

if I
swear to
you in all
honesty
no one turned his
back on it
never

gets tested like
regular water.

It's just
water.

I mop the
spill
into a
bucket and
the heavy goddamn búcket
brims too.

The bucket
gets kicked like
a regular
bucket.
It's

only
a bucket.

A thimbleful of
pressure knots
the muscle in
the wrist of
my hand. Gingerly, I

work it out.

It's just a pulse.

Ruth Foxe Blader

The Paper Street

Through the little lizards of dust that mat
the screen and send the sun between the lime
film as though through isinglass, the glare.
I'd like an opaque formica block to drain
the day, but my chin's hinged to this sill. Here.
I can see the row of six-pronged barbed wire
stars that scrape the gate and eventually
run into the ditch, the neighbor's porch, lattice-lined,
and broken by erosion and by the boys
who wait under there with a box full of bb's.
And there are eighteen shades of stone, laid between
flat hacks of shale, pale and scratched, heavy
as shin-bones lodged in the dust. Then puddles
caked with slime thick as flesh jowls and two clotheslines
run mostly with underthings, where someone may stick
a frog in the fine, gauze crotch or, at least,
a tick. The red car, its roof caved, ragweed grown up
through the tires, chrome gas tank rust-crusted,
the back window busted through, one glass fang hanging
sharp enough to cut the head off a cat, hasn't
moved in seven years, I've lived here, just a dust-
clod clung to the screen, breeze, a rotting
frame where nothing's marked danger. No one
complains. The boys, blistering in their worn
dungarees, rise from their place beneath the porch.

Jonathan Blum

Oakland (Their souls were bound up)

You were in a crisis. You were in the response
team that drove to the crisis. Things never looked
better for you. You could hardly afford to eat.

According to a neighbor, help came years too late.
According to the father, a neighbor acted just in time.
According to witnesses, a woman ran out
with her hands over her head.
According to the county, the doctor
had been transferred to another facility.

Later we learned that two children
and their mother had been living in the building.
Finally, we bought a motion detector for the gate.
Suddenly we saw flames leaping at the window.
After that, we sent our children to another school.

An so she got out of teaching? (What do you expect?)
And so they took the business elsewhere? (Too many hassles.)
And so they turned to the church? (What choice did they have?)
And got in through the roof? (It was that easy.)

Well, the next day I saw a young man's body lying in front of the dry cleaners
I had never seen anything like it: garbage literally piled to the ceiling
And what did you do when you found out you were going to have to leave?
Gone, she said: without a trace.

Who coached the basketball team? Who steered the committee?
You may build a prison. You may sell caskets.

Fortunately, someone arrived who could translate.

By miracle, there was enough for everyone.
Laughing, we passed the sign *Espresso teriyaki burritos grits*
Decisively, we voted yes.

What I Could Not Explain to Grandad

that we were in California
that I was his grandson
that his grandson Mikey from Israel was getting married in ten minutes
that the wedding was in California
that there was a wedding
that I was driving
that it was ten minutes away
that he had to wear shoes
that this was not a trick
that Betty was at the wedding
that grapes grow on vines
that grapes grow in California
that there were no whorehouses
that I was Jonathan
that I was in his party
that Mikey was getting married
that his first grandson to get married was getting married
that the wedding was in his honor
that he didn't need to shave his nose
that his tie was straight
that Betty was there
that the family was there
that we were in California
that he was Abbott
that the wedding was in his honor

J.M. Boyd

News from the Front

Ben, our manager, reholstered the phone:
Well, they've started. His lips drew grim, hard line.
Our talk of user scenarios and test schedules
Rang suddenly hollow; better now to hold a silent candle
Wrapped in foil, wave a picket, hoist a banner,
Surround the pillared dome with our fears:
A brother in Killeen, a mortal friend in the Atlantic.
On company time, our own deadlines were looming.
Hand-install poured us out along the rows,
An assembly line of rebirth:
Snick that first diskette inside, boot, pass it on.
Hard drives became blank as sleep without dreams,
Each disk in turn painting another layer
Until a lab's worth of desktop and tower models
Bore the newest image for our approval.
On lunch break our intern fought Star Invaders,
Stylized craft exploding into argentine florets,
Spectacular and bloodless as the news
From the front, a single unfiltered clip
Panning mile after mile of charred hulks
Strewn along the highway to the capital.
Over the weeks our programmers sent us stacks
Of fresh diskettes, of fresh incarnations.
When at last the bug reports trickled to minutia,
Our victory as one-sided, Ben was jubilant:
We had to do it, you know; the man had to be stopped.

Thistles

A naked bulb hangs from a wire.
A dozen times
Drops of water on the shower wall
catch the glare. Gaps of light
open a corner on each dark circle
reversing the images
of a spray of first-quarter moons.

Outside the trees on the alley green, as
between a crash and a thud the dumpster
disgorges its cargo of week-old vegetables
and broken glass. Against the building
a rosette tower of thorn is crowned
by needle-thin lavender flutes
adorned in turn by bumblebees.
A bone-white crescent
cools against the perfect sky.

It's easy to want the full or the new,
but mostly, this is what we get:
a hot shower and harsh, dangling light.

D&C

Lately,
at four in the morning
I've been counting my wife's breathing,
rising and falling like whispered
prayers around my head.

Slowly,
trying to keep motion at a minimum, I
roll into a fetal position, facing
moon-shadowed walls, counting more
bills than money, listening for novel
characters who remain reticent, thinking
about my flesh unborn, scraped out
of the womb and discarded as medical
waste in sterile operating rooms.

Obviously,
my thoughts have become raucous,
stirring my wife to sleep-laden words
as she reaches for me and I close
my eyes in the warmth of her embrace
awaiting the face of the sun, wondering,
boy or girl?

Sonnin Dahl

GLACIERS

He knew Sister Mary Patrick's blue habit
her red fingernails
her head bald in deference to God
her way of balancing his Martin guitar between her knees

on a fishing boat called *Le Deluge* temptation
lured like a siren
salmon the size of their forearms, hers firm, his freckled
whitecaps of water
glaciers on the horizon
freedom preserved in ice

even glaciers erode with age
and when his cuff links were sent home
his cancered body cremated
Sister Mary Patrick left her blue habit
laying empty on the bed

Awe

I am haunted by numerous islands
places to return to
gone by but once
gnawed by the teeth of wanting more.
Refuse they to relent their grip on me-
less than a torment
and more than a whim of the wisp -
they rise at night and storm me
with needles of restlessness.
I would take you back with memory
or forward along in hungry explorations.
With you I've gone ways I might
not have walked alone -
without the pull, the draw, the lash
of wide and pure-eyed expectations.
These were yours.
These woolen meteors make me dream;
they do not land in one place,
or weave in me a single island.
Who knows the numbers of the meteors
or the distance that they fall?
Who counts the shores of calling islands
or hears the names of splashing waves?
Who metes out love or measures trust
or mends with threads of restless awe?

Last Poem of the Year

Last poem of the year,
I promise.
The moon is always a new gift,
Night after night, never old.
All festivals tie together
Nature and culture.
New Year's Eve is a feast
Of astronomy and art.
A year is a revolution
Of earth on elliptical path.
Tonight an arbitrary position
A bit of arc traversed
With every place an ending.
Every finish a new start,
An eve as much as a festival.

Astronomy is absolute;
Art is derived, contingent -
Both are glorious, indispensable.
The joy of so-far in life
And toast to a not-yet coming.
The courage to be and become
Before we pass from the world.
Such great music and orchestral faces
With fingers intense on strings
Riding airwaves from New York.
I, fingering Irish stamps
For a philatelic collection.
Candles burning in a family room,
Jackie talking on a telephone.

Tomorrow the Rose Bowl
Game, parade, friends for lunch.
Anticipation meets commemoration,
The present promises and celebrates.

During paper chain days
Magically carpeting through irresponsible dreams
Below those hazy future portraits
And above the extended flood plains of adolescence
Behold the large world in the brightness of analogy
With eyes as deep as glorious stories
As fertile as the memory of unpredictable dawns
And those horizons stretched out to resemble spirits of stars and jewels

Like some ancient geometrist let us make circles together with our steady chalk and
broken hands

A passion for transient pleasures
Slowly brands our weapons of mass construction
Enticing hearts in a sky of uneasy reflections

Uncovering scattered pages of mountain lions feasting on lilies and baubles and sunburnt
flowers

Playing secret boogie sound machines linking those park benches of forbidden love
Where immodesty opens doors
And mystery adds desire to delight

We know all the paths that exaggerate the depth of all we've forgotten
And the tender spectacle of fatal immortality uniting arts with crafts

What Dreams Are Meant To Say

Lately I've dreamt of waiting for someone at the zoo,
in Tokyo, in front of an art-deco gate adorned
with robot animals. I can't remember who I'm there
for. I'm expecting anyone-any old girlfriend,
any old teacher, any old mom.

Who shows up but a middle-aged Iranian,
the same one who made my old girlfriend
an omelet in this very zoo many years ago.
He cooked it for her in a frying pan on a habachi,
after she asked if she could take his picture.

"He looked so forlorn," she had told me,
"sitting there in the zoo, by himself, with
his own little kitchen, eating his own little eggs."

Conformal Representation

Imagine a language so advanced, and so abstruse,
that it could collapse three dimensions into two.

Where the slightest premonition of unease
can be reduced to a function.

Where a slip of paper you hand to yourself
has it all written down.

And every role you think you play
is determined by the one before it.

Where celebrity is inverse to doubt
and sorrow is a Greek omega.

A Hollow Gourd

1.
"Dress him up: a pirate, bearded lady,
whatever. Swaddle him
in some motley costumery

and while you're at it, pumpkin, carve the gourd
and put the candle in.
So, out the door

with you. Remember: don't forget to ask
politely. And last..."

He got away to harvest sweets and play,
and later, with a grin,
reached up and tore
off the mask

to feast alone among his friends: the scents
of wood, of grass, of stone, the owly silence.

2.
Or could it be he found a house out there,
in mid-construction, sprouting - poured foundation
and erected frame, some teeth to comb the air
out of the wind - and sat down in this mansion,
crossed his legs, and piled his inventories
around him: mounds of chocolate, a heap
of worthless shit (the tricks) he couldn't eat
or just plain wouldn't, since apples made him worry?

Later, underneath the moon (so full
she creaked as she went), the boy remembered home,
the old man, the melodramatic bull
on TV. He left one thing behind in his room
that night: a stone
thrown through a windowless frame.
He was testing his aim.

The Morning Before the Evening After

Suppose at that last moment
we'd composed ourselves
out of the flurry up to
presently we'd been

enough to trace on the fog
our names and watch them
gravitate, gingerly dip

one's loose curls' loops in
the other's, dissipating

in the thousand gusts

in the quick respiration

in the air we two breathe, Now,
even as the dew

Distills, soaks our clothes, this grass
is the picture of
the imperceptibly drawn
tumults of small hills.

Sudden lime-green light ignites
the surrounding haze:
sun clearing the horizon.

I raise one knee. You, whistle.

THE PLANE OF SUCH A CIRCLE

Grayness returns again to its room. I remain
among my bricks. This condition strikes me
as loneliness. Were either of us to swallow,
it would move to our throats.

Everybody knows that side by side this city
and the sky touch each other sometime.
The sky's massive tunnels admit
aircraft after aircraft even through morning fog.

Into the gutter falls a coin without a sound above
other sounds. Still I wear only what I own.
Tall railings line the bridge.
This, too, is mine.

Enough. The milk's been turning bad.
The sky's been blushing
in endless streaks of pavement
for minutes now.

WEATHER UPDATE

A mechanical whirring runs inside machines nearby.
There's a hollow feeling in my teeth.
It's like I'm clean, my skin wet with bathwater still.
Instead the cotton knit of my spring sweater weighs slightly on my shoulders.
Around my wrists the sweater's loose.
Machines nearby cool themselves.

Tonight we wait for the Gulf front. We predict accumulation.
One of us warms her hands between her thighs.
I twist my silver rings as they seem to loosen on my fingers.
My hands are cold.
There's a hollow feeling in my teeth.
Tonight the redbuds are way down south spitting out the shades they keep down all winter.
We wait for accumulation.
The machinery nearby cools itself.
It's like I'm watching, my body dripping still, but instead I'm patient for the warm front to
meet the cool.
A mechanical whirring is hollowing my skin;
my teeth are clean.
The cotton knot of my spring sweater accumulates.
Way down south, the redbud warms her hands between her thighs.
Her skin is wet.
The silver rings loosen. Around the wrists I'm clean.
Over my shoulders, the front comes up from the Gulf, dripping still.
It's like I'm hollow.
It's like I'm silver.
One of us is watching, way down south all winter.
Inside, machines weigh-slightly.
I'm patient waiting, keeping the shades down.
On my fingers, they seem to loosen.

LIFE OF A HORSE

(Van Gogh)

There are places where stone is found,
where God sees trouble and sorrow:
an old horse lying on the grass like dew.
Boys had lit a bonfire, its gray spire
high above them, houses with their red roofs,
uncurtained gardens, a bridge over which
people passed like black figures -
And the moon was rising, an old lady
with beautiful gray hair.
The end of life is tears or white hair.
On the ground lies a skull like a well of water
springing up - our reward of our labor?
The days are full of evil.

Poor horse, covered with dry grass,
this world passeth away.
Chestnut trees sacrifice their yellow leaves.
Let us pray we become rich.
Let us pray our bodies be full of light.

STARRY NIGHT

God does not believe in the resurrection of the soul.
He believes in continuance, man and his work.
He seems not to believe in heaven;
attaches great importance to what you are doing,
since it is probably all you have.

He would comfort us so that we might stop
feeling guilty and stretched,
not have to stop at every step in panic,
or calculate the harm we do.

At night I go out to paint stars and am full of ardor,
dreaming of comrades, firm and interwoven.
The picture comes to me as dream:
a starry night under a gas jet.
The town is blue and violet, the gas is yellow.
The blue-green sky sparkles green and pink,
contrasts with the harsh, gold gas.
Lovers in the foreground.
We must not complain of living in an age of nothing.

God is an eclipse.
We are passing through it now.
Perhaps one of these nights
I shall be in the field if the sky is sparkling.

Spring Thaw

Listening to the sound
of the creek
lap-dancing with rocks
and the hum of the tractor
on the hill
makes the burn
in my calves worthwhile.
A butterfly summer-saults
as it skirts to close
and the breeze kisses
sweat on my face.

I look past the yellow
flowering heads of creecy-greens
past the fields of alfalfa
soon to be cut
past the green thimble hills
to the blue mountains
and I wonder about
refractions of light
that take green, brown and gray
and turn them purplish blue.

Reaching the knoll of the hill
I rub my calves and thighs bend in the middle
rest my hands on my knees.
The hiss of my breath
rhythmic clap of my heart
plop of my sweat
into the dust
of the gravel road
are the sounds
of my creek.

Kelly Kester-Smith

Late Summer Storm

On August evenings we sat on the porch
and shelled late peas to a first breath
of coolness. The only sounds
the pop of the pod, the quick zip
of heartless prying thumbs, and the
ting ting ting of startled green pearls
hitting the sides of stainless steel bowls
clenched between our knees.
Abandoned pea-wombs lay raped and torn;
tossed into a dejected heap
to mourn the loss of their young.

The scents of dampness and expectation
clung to the air as tow'ring thunderheads
roiled and darkened and rumbled.
Something primal rose in our chests
awakened by raw and child-like emotions
long since folded and put away for winter.

"Lightning!" whispered the passionate chest.
"Rain," drawled the world-weary tongue.

The Gridded Life

Entering the gridded life,
one evolves into an upright rat
creeping through a concrete maze.
Block by block
you learn your world,

committing key landmarks
to memory: a Fatburger here,
a palm reader there,
knowing that once
outside "your" quadrant
it all looks the same running on
and on through Venice and
Lennox to Compton.

A mass produced scheme
repeats itself from downtown
to The Valley to Palmdale:
Nails, Donuts, Liquor, Lawyer
Our Needs, our Neuroses
as easy to read as a neon
marquis on a Mini-Mall:
that Corner Queen of city and
burbs who reins supreme over foolish
dreams of men who fail
in her over-priced cells
losing savings, wife, occasionally life.

Careful now, don't make a wrong turn.
A couple of blocks makes a difference.
A Thomas Guide gives you the names
of the streets, not the names of the gangs
who may hand down a heavy pennance
despite the sincerely cried Hail Mary's
which tumble from dry, shaking lips.
Not long after buying the bright design
of a cross-stitch world which you-
yes, you! can re-create
simply by turning numbered squares
into clever stitches on a pristine grid,
do you comprehend that the master plan,
so slick, so neat, so precise in your hand,
becomes a sprawling tangle of knots
when transposed from paper to pavement.

Lisa Laguna

People of the Alleys

"Lord, you search me and you know me."

Where do you find me Unceasing Seeker?
Do you see me in the alley?
I wonder

Do you see what I see there?
Jose reclines in a Frigidaire refrigerator box
His kingdom

Do you know Rosario?
She has three grown children
They have forgotten - Mother?

Do you remember Oscar?
He died alone on Whittier Boulevard
John Doe they said
We knew
The People of the Alleys

Do you see them in their pain?
Did you love them in the secret of their conception?
Do you love them now?
Is their darkness light to you?
I want to know
O God of the Alleys
Lover of the Poor - your people,
Keeper of all promises, and
Light in our darkness,
You are still there

You embrace Jose and warm his body

When others walk away in disgust

At night you remind Rosario that
She is remembered, and in her ear
You whisper, "I love you my mother."

As for Oscar, he is named and watching us now
The People of the Alleys

You are the ever-present Unceasing Seeker
Amen.

Darkness had come
I looked up
And saw five stars
That formed a

S E
M L
I

more.

memoirs of my life
too young to know
too young to understand
too young to feel the outside night and day

socks and pillowcases
hang heavy with melancholy
from our clothesline
as whales wash up on shore
sands of togetherness yell at the waves--
begging to be bathed and sunken.

my eyes drain the color from my dress.

the moon offers to carry my pain
as the cows assemble into a line
preparing for the slaughterhouse.
They leave the pasture drenched in tears
shed from the knowing of death's minute.

calmness was never born.

Driving the Mountains

October trees flame.
Brown weeds bend,
fog almost burnt away.
We travel through the tunnel
in West Virginia,
drive out of a wisp of cloud
into the royal blue day.
Two years ago we traveled
this same road
past the cows and sheep down
in the valley,
abandoned shanties;
granite rolled off hillsides.
Today, we head toward
my uncle's funeral.
He was strong as old roots,
tall as wisteria.
Now we glimpse the sloped trees,
leaves turned yellow, fluttering.
Next Spring when sap runs
like slow honey,
and we drive to Bluefield,
we will remember my uncle praising light.

Untitled

As a bird flies
So does the river flow
But life is not always aglow
Splinters and nails get in our path
Questions with no answers go unasked
So how does our boat go afloat?
Truth will tell what no one knows
Butterflies' wings will truly shine
When love prevails into a vine.
Nature will grow its tremendous roots
As a snowman plunges into his boots
So how does our boat go afloat?
No one knows
As our treasure burns.

bessie's blues

who loves bessie
in this strange era of ears?
who holds her in the do not enter/ exit only
retrograde of lovers?

who humors the ugliness
and rugged child petals?
what hand explains air
without need of quarter or smile?

even the blind know the feel of seeds
blossoming along palm lines.

but I want to know
who loves bessie
in her day dark?
in her coil?
who loves bessie by name?

Engagement of the Fire Signs

long time now
we speak of flame
and coming to the heart
of matters
which means
crackles and popping,
limbs stretched
wanting and waiting

for ink or wings

some days it takes all
of what we have
or dream to be inside
to lift the air
to braid a path
bright with our own custody—
revealing a sun
steeped in the clearing

crisscrossing tracks and landings,
crumbled stone, bleached wood,
you arrive,
djembe1 and juju2
tambourine and shakere3
a kora4 to cool the tongue

burn your kindling
on this dry flat palm-
make this spare space
insistent upon sound
rise a togetherness.

1 Djembe-type of African drum
2 Juju-an African drum
3 Shakere-percussive instrument made from a gourd
4 Kora-stringed musical instrument

Because Transfer Credits Counted

Go. . . .so it was said
Sow wild seeds on yonder
and don't ever look back
For all that blooms in this garden
shall be your future, bright.
But the past now casts its shadow
and the lustre now has waned.
Still,
what you sowed has blossomed
and is brilliant all the same.

Ode to Robert

The backdoor man sold his soul
To an art that left him dry
Baking in a hot sun that burnt the life
Out of his callused fingers,
Fluttering up and down the long dry wooden box
That sung the praises of humanity
And the curses of humans
Who rode the chariots of Gods long dead
In the hearts of mankind.

The long dry wooden box is all that is left
Of the soul's life giving freedom,
Sailing through a long dry wooden sky,
Boxing us all into a grief
That will never be sold
Because it is too priceless a possession
To those who it owns.

MECHIKAK
Redefined in my LANGUAGE.
Not this adopted tongue.
But my REAL language, the one I spoke before I was born.
In my mother's womb.
MECHIKAK.
EL LENGUAJE, de heavy accents and rolling sounds.
The one my foremothers spoke before me.
MY NATIVE TONGUE. LA QUE EXPRESSA TODO LO QUE SIENTO.
Like this, con HUEVOS, no prissing around,
choosing words. Just say it and you get it right.
ASI desde me VULVA. From that part where all that I am becomes one.
MY PANOCHA. CON HUEVOS.
The one I speak in my SUENOS. The language that comes from my centro,
where I am all energy.
THAT is MECHIKAK.
That long ago mutilated language.
The one my foremothers spoke
EL LENGUAJE ADOPTADO, MUTILATED language, COMO YO.
Like me. MUTILATED
Desde me VULVA, all the way to mi CORAZON.
ASI ME MUTILASTE, when you took away my language. You left me without
EXPRESIONES, sin palabras to EXPRESS myself with. MUTILADA.
WITHOUT MY ENERGY. WITHOUT MY CENTER. WITHOUT MY-SELF. MECHIKAK.
MECHIKAK. MECHIKAK.
MUTILATED PEOPLE.

Une rue de pays

La maison française avec son jardin d'herbes et de fées
La maison style-missionaire avec sa cloche et sa garniture bleue
La maison blanche moderne avec ses cascades de fleurs roses et addresses flueorescentes
La maison de foret avec ses arbres de bois rouge et les arbustes de fleurs violettes
Nous goutions de leur beauté et varieté
Notre promenade sur Canyon View.

A Road of Countries

The French house with the garden of herbs and fairies
The mission-style house with the bell and the blue trim
The white modern house with the cascades of pink flowers and fluorescent address
The forest house with the redwood trees and the bushes of violet flowers
We enjoy the variety
Our walk on Canyon View.

Ever turn carelessly
Left or right into the arms of a Dead End
Thought to yourself, out loud...Aw shit!
Knew you were fucked
realized you'd fucked yourself
Bent over, literally dropped the soap
A contradiction in itself
Stirred an anger skin deep
A rage you swallowed
You have to, just give it up
Drive away cursing only yourself
Impeccable, all that,
find another route
cause you don't have it in you to get through here
Look back savor the unforgettable
that chill that raced up your spine
The DEAD END
did nothing
said even less
just stood there
In your face
like candy taken
what little nerve
drove you there

******

Feelings and senses
have always been
inside of me trapped
by force or fear...I am a human being

should I love knowing

how fierce, your thrust, our warmth
all of me, for you

My gift to you, us
unrestricted consumption
feast on me...on us

Not knowing is the gift of innocence
Not wanting to know is the outcome of reality

Dear mami
it took me thirty years
To pay off my dream house
my dream was
fulfilling
doing in my lifetime
what my life
took from yours

Padre
last night I heard you cry
not for me or anything due
I heard you cry
For that prisoner in your heart
May you finally Rest with Peace, VEGA

******

My mother told me stop. I went
She said don't. I did
For every yes I had a no
She had a look that said all without a single sound or word
Even then, I never listened
I never listened

Only now I know why she said stop
she said stop
and I wished she'd stopped me

As I cradle you in my arms
I remember my mother
Especially when you slap
the bottle out of my reach

mama says I had a mind of my own
As I hold you I see it too
So as your mother
I will not only say stop
I'll tell you what's ahead
And when I say don't
I'll say why

So when you trip over a rock
it will be because you didn't walk around it
when I told you it was there

Julia

Another Reply to the Passionate Shepherd

Yes! These delights my mind did move;
I lived with thee and was thy love!
Your promises, as snow came round,
All withered, faded, turned to brown.

One year we sat upon the rocks,
And then on those I washed your socks.
First we loved and all was Heaven.
Children born, and those were seven.

Only happiness did I feel
Before I had to rush a meal
And send the children off to school.
Transient Joy! I was a fool.

The cheer I found in gold turned mould;
But nothing went as I was told.
You promised summer would not end,
But now I labor just to mend

The youth I had before I came.
Silence! You lousy shepherd swain!
Nature sings, brightens in hue.
It seems that only I am blue.

The promises to have been had?
They have all died; it makes me mad.
And where were you in all of this?
Tanned, on your rock, and full of bliss.

Keep the children and all they own.
Daydream pleasures, I should have known!
But these delights my mind did move;
I lived with thee and was thy love.

she walks on a tight
rope,
along trenches between
this and other
fear and hate

from within her sacredness
she aches and feels
the pull towards
keep and live

night-womb
and hot red-sea drops
with sugar syrup drip
in blue vein coffins

wrench and tear
scream
and her face fades
while angel dust falls

outstretched
she turns her eyes
into the wind

All-American Plumbing

The water
is it the sink?
or the tub
drips
drips
drums
its tattoo of
infinitum
shifting such
so and so

but listen!
it all too eagerly returns
to its
same
safe
dull
pattern

ONE fat drop
heard a little louder
off-key and out-of-beat
soon to be forgotten

These are my triumphs.

Fiction

The Window Man

During my sixth summer, when Daddy built a playhouse in our backyard, I met the window man.

I usually played in our frontyard. The backyard was only for emptying the garbage and playing hide-and-go-seek. But that summer I dressed quickly and shovelled breakfast so I could carry my play furniture out to my new house. I imagined rooms within the outside frame. It didn't matter. I loved my playhouse. Some days my mother even let me eat my lunch in it.

Our back steps faced a window that belonged to the Hall-Mac factory, a red brick building that stood behind our backyard and on the left side of our frontyard. I knew men worked inside the factory, but they always looked busy and uninterested in what the neighbor children were doing.

One morning that sumer, I sat on the porch step to tie my doll's bonnet. It was then I heard his voice for the first time. "Hello. Do you like your new house?"

"Oh, yes," I said, before remembering I wasn't supposed to talk to strangers.

"I've been watching you every day, but you've been so busy getting your house ready I didn't want to bother you."

He seemed nice so I said, "That's OK. Guess I was so busy I didn't even see you. Do you always work at this window?"

"No, I was just transferred here from another department about a week ago."

I asked him how he liked it, and he smiled and said he enjoyed being by a window and looking outside.

"Well, good-bye. Maybe I'll see you later," I said and walked to my playhouse.

The next day and the day after, we said, "Good morning" and "How are you?" and that was all. On the third day he asked me my name. "It's Rebecca, but everyone calls me Becky, unless I'm being scolded. "What's yours?"

"Mr. Lewis."

"Is that what everyone calls you?"

"No, but that's what you can call me. OK?"

"OK, Mr. Lewis."

He asked me how old I was so I told him and was just about to ask him how old he was when I remembered my mother told me once it wasn't polite to ask people their age, especially old people. And my six-year-old eyes knew he was old, at least older than my mother and daddy. Mr. Lewis had mostly white hair with lines on his face. But his eyes weren't old. They were blue with no lines.

Since Mr. Lewis wasn't a stranger anymore, I decided to tell Mother and Daddy about my new friend, the window man. Daddy was working during the week, but my mother said she wanted to meet him. The next day she followed me to his window. Mr. Lewis told her he liked to watch and listen to me play with my imaginary friends in the playhouse. That embarrassed me a little because I didn't know he could hear me. Then he told her I reminded him of his granddaughter. After that I didn't mind him listening.

One day while eating lunch I saw something wrapped in wax paper on the outside windowsill. A small piece of white paper stuck out from under the wax paper. On the paper someone had printed BECKY. I felt something soft. By the time I reached the kitchen, I had partly unfolded the wax paper. A piece of chocolate frosting appeared. "Mother, look what I found on the windowsill." At first she said I shouldn't have taken it, but when I showed her my name she smiled and said, "How nice. I bet Mr. Lewis left it for you. Did you thank him?"

"He wasn't there. He must still be eating his lunch. the second whistle hasn't blown yet." I decided to eat my cake on the back steps and wait for my new friend.

The whistle blew before I finished the cake. I looked up and saw Mr. Lewis. I walked closer to the window and said, "Mr. Lewis, thank you for the cake. It's really good and chocolate is my favorite."

"I'm glad you like it. I'll tell Mrs. Lewis. She made it yesterday. Our granddaughter used to like that kind."

"Doesn't she like it anymore?"

"I'm not sure. I never see her."

"Did she move away?" I asked.

"Yes. You better go wash your face and hands now."

That was the beginning of my special desserts. Every day after lunch I could hadly wait to see what the wax paper was hiding. Sometimes it was chocolate chip cookies. Often it was cake, all chocolate or white with chocolate frosting. I told Mr. Lewis it didn't always have to be chocolate, and the next day I found a piece of apple pie. One day I found iced ani-

mal cookies.

By the middle of summer the playhouse and my imaginary friends started to get boring. Talking with my real-life friend was much more fun. But there was a problem. If I stood right under the window, I couldn't see Mr. Lewis, and if I stood back, it was too hard to talk for a long time. I needed help to climb up to the windowsill, which was even with my head. Mr. Lewis thought of my play chair. After climbing and stretching, I had to curl my legs to fit on the sill and duck my head under the pushed-out window. But I didn't mind climbing, curling, and ducking. Having my own window man to talk to made me feel special.

He told me about the farm where he grew up. He remembered the animals and the games he and his brothers and sister played. He made living in the country sound much more exciting than living in a busy city like Los Angeles.

Sometimes he had to stop in the middle of a story and take the finished rack of soap dishes over to the big tank for dipping. That's when I'd change my leg position and try not to bump my head.

One day we were talking about his three sons. He told me one was married. When I asked if he had any little boys and girls, Mr. Lewis didn't answer. I thought maybe he didn't hear me because of the factory noise, so I asked again. This time he said, "Yes, one little girl, Angela, but she's gone now."

"Is she the one that moved away?"

"Yes."

"Where did she move to? Very far away?"

"Yes. Very far. The angels took her to heaven after the accident." Even from my angle I could see his face change. His usual smile went away. His blue eyes turned lighter with some tears.

I was about to tell him I was sorry and ask what happened when my legs began to cramp. Then, before I started to crawl down, he answered my unspoken question. "I didn't see her behind my car. She was about your size with the same blond hair. I hit her tricycle. Not hard, but she fell off and hit her head on the asphalt. She died the next day."

My legs stopped cramping. Now it was my stomach. What should I say? I had to say something. "I bet she likes being with the angels. My mother told me everyone has an angel so now Angela's with hers. I bet she's happy."

"I hope so," he said. "I hope she's forgiven me. But you'd better get down now. Your mother will wonder what's happened to you. And be careful."

"I will. Bye, Mr. Lewis. I'll see you tomorrow." My legs were stiffer than usual, but I walked up the stairs as fast as I could. When I found my mother, I told her about Angela and the accident. She said that now she understood why Mr. Lewis took such a liking to me.

My window man and I talked every day and I waited for my surprise dessert, wishing the summer would never end. He told me more stories about the farm, but he never mentioned Angela again.

One day, later in the summer, I was in my usual position on the windowsill. It was time for me to go, and Mr. Lewis tried to open the window a little wider and give me more room. But I didn't duck low enough.

When I woke up, there were white walls all around me. My mother sat on one side of the bed and my daddy was on the other. I stared at them. "What happened?"

My mother said that I had an accident and fell from the window. She had been hanging clothes in the front yard and didn't hear Mr. Lewis calling her. So he asked his boss if he could leave the factory and try to find the front of our house. She said he found her and they both rushed to the backyard. Mr. Lewis carried me inside our house. She told me that after the ambulance came Mr. Lewis said, "I'm so sorry. Please let me know how Becky is. It was my fault," and then he went back to the factory.

That night I heard the doctor tell my mother and daddy they could take me home but not to let me sleep too much and if I got sick to my stomach to call him.

The next morning I asked my mother if I could go and see Mr. Lewis. "He'll be worried about me and I want to thank him." She said she had already told him I was fine and would probably see him in a couple of days.

"He left you this," my mother said. She handed me my wax-paper dessert. It was a paper cup filled with chocolate pudding. My mother said, "Mr. Lewis told me to tell you he's sorry he made you fall and is glad you're all right."

She brought me my dessert for three days. On the fourth day, my head wan't hurting as much so she let me go outside for a few minutes. But I couldn't crawl up on the windowsill. I stood on the ground and talked to Mr. Lewis. I thanked him for the desserts and told him what happened in the hospital. Before I left he said, "I'm sorry you fell. It was my fault. Please be careful."

"I will. And it wasn't your fault. I missed the chair. Bye, I'll see you tomorrow."

That night we got a call from my Uncle Ted. He was married to my mother's sister, Helen, who had to go to the hospital. Uncle Ted wanted my mother to come for a few days to stay with my cousins. She told me I would be going with her and that we'd leave the next morning at 7:00.

"Can't we wait until the whistle blows and Mr. Lewis comes? I want to tell him good-bye. He might worry about me and think I'm sick again."

"I'll write him a note and you can leave it on the windowsill."

"Okay, I guess, but I'll have to put something on it so it won't blow away." I looked around the room. On the table was a block with my clown costume picture on it. "That's perfect," I whispered to myself. "Now he won't forget me."

A week later we came home. It was before lunch time. I threw my little suitcase on the bed, put my baby doll in her buggy, and hurried to the backyard. Mr. Lewis wasn't at the window. Thinking he was probably dipping his soap dishes, I sat on the steps and waited.

After a few minutes, a man came to the window but it wasn't Mr. Lewis. I stood up and walked closer to the window. "Mr.," I said, "I'm Becky and Mr. Lewis, he's my friend. Did he get moved to another department?"

At first the man didn't say anything. Then he said, "Just a minute." Maybe he's gone to get Mr. Lewis, I thought. Or maybe he's moved to the other side of the factory and I can find him in a front yard window. But why didn't the man just say that?

Finally, this new man and another one came back to the window. "Becky, I have some bad news for you. Mr. Lewis got very sick two days ago. He had to go to the hospital. I'm sorry."

"Will he come back when he's better, like I did?"

"I'm not sure," the second man said. Just then my mother was on our back porch and noticed I was talking to two new men and not Mr. Lewis. She came outside and down the steps. I ran over and told her what happened. She asked if his illness was serious, and the second man told her Mr. Lewis had a heart attack. When I asked her what that was, she said she would tell me later.

Two weeks passed and we didn't hear anymore about Mr. Lewis. On the following Saturday, I was playing in my room when I heard a knock on our front door. Daddy was working on the car and my mother was on the back porch, so I opened the door. A short, round lady with white hair stood on the porch.

"Hello, are you Becky?"

"Yes," I said.

"Well, I'm Mrs. Lewis. Is your mother home?"

"Yes." I ran to the back porch. "Mrs. Lewis is here. She wants to talk to you.

My mother invited Mrs. Lewis to come into the living room. As soon as she sat down I said, "How's Mr. Lewis? Is he home from the hospital?"

At first she looked down at her purse resting on her lap. She called me over. "Becky, Mr. Lewis won't be coming back to the factory." She wiped her eyes, opened her purse. She explained that Mr. Lewis asked her to write me a note and give it to me with this package. But it wasn't wrapped in wax paper. It was in a bag.

I opened the bag and inside there was the block I had given to Mr. Lewis. Only now, besides my clown picture, there was a picture of him and a little girl with blonde hair. My mother read the note.

Dear Becky,

I won't be seeing you anymore. When you receive this, you'll know I'm with my Angela. Thank you for being my other special angel.

Your window friend, Mr. Lewis

Now the tears were mine. "Does this mean he knows Angel's accident and mine weren't his fault?"

"I think so."

One week later first grade began. For "show and tell" I took my picture block. When it was my turn I held it up and turned Mr. Lewis and Angela's picture toward the class.

"this is my window man and his angel." I met him last summer and he used to leave me a dessert outside his window."

In the Cemetery on South Black Diamond Road, Wretham, Iowa

The cross broke off the top of your grave in the 1950's and your husband and his second wife and their two infant children lie on the other side of this green sun-soaked patch of weeds. The old German Joann Strickler your closest neighbor twenty feet away. This afternoon a freshly dead deer with bloody eyes lies curled in a ditch by the road.

Bevins
Mary J.
Wife of Richard
b. co. Clare, Ire
c. Oct. 7, 1883
aged
19 years 4 m 22 days
may her soul rest in peace
amen

But know this: the day you died Richard went back to his brother's fields and worked until they dragged him home. And he wouldn't go to the church for the funeral because he told anybody who would listen that he hated God and would break his neck if he saw him.

You could never have known he'd behave that way. He wasn't a man put on a show about anything. But that's what people started saying. That his grief was too much. Unbecoming, they said. An embarrassment to the family. And the women standing on the porch of the Wretham Store also murmured that there were certainly other women around. What about Thomas Maher's daughter Bridget? Girl's sixteen now and at least got some meat on her bones. Man has to buck up and move on, they whispered. But when they were alone in the wind with their sick babies, they cheered him. That man who loved her so hard couldn't stop working, knew no other way to endure sorrow other than keeping his red hands clenched and busy.

The cattle on the hillside low. A car whooshes - a flash of moving bright red light and it's gone. A hawk lands on the deer and flaps off. And you. This hazy green and pink five o'clock light. You here alone.

Mary who they said was too feeble, who they said was too meek, who they said would never make it here and how right they were, how right. They hated you for your big eyes and the way you jumped on your toes when you walked. They hated that you sang to yourself. The way you smiled for no reason, the way you licked your lips sometimes when you saw your husband coming up the road. Yes licked like her husband was some food!

And they clasped their hands together in Richard's brother's house full of mourners and sighed as if they were sorry for not being wrong, but down deep they were never sorry. They were pleased to know they were such good judges of the odds of surviving here. You didn't have it Mary, laughing little thing;how'd you think you'd make it? — and everybody knew, including your Richard. Richard shouting Mary as they pried his hand away from the spade the afternoon you died, in that little bed, in the kitchen.

The White Carriage

"This stretch of freeway is more frightening than that roller coaster we rode in Nevada, remember? The roller coaster half an hour before Las Vegas?" asked Estelle.

"Yeah, I remember it and no, this road isn't as bad as that coaster. You're exaggerating. You just hate it 'cause we're going downhill at 55 miles per hour." replied David.

"And the semi-trucks. I cannot tell you how many times I have seen those trucks nearly run cars off the road." said Estelle. "The darn truck drivers always cut into the right lane at the bottom of the hill to meet the freeway interchange. I swear the 405 North is the worst freeway in Los Angeles; in California; in the entire world."

"You're a wuss. You have no daredevil spirit in you."

"Pardon me, but I like to be just as daredevily as anyone else. I just don't want to.....David, look at the ....watch out! The truck, the red truck.....David!"

An hour later.

Estelle cried out, "This is what I was talking about. This truck driver needs to be put away. Locked up. Destroyed. His semi nearly crushed us. The guy was totally at fault. David, David are you listening to me?".

"I'm listening. Give me a minute, I feel dizzy."

"We're lucky to be alive. A few inches more to the right and that could have been it. The end. No more Estelle and David."

While Estelle talked to David, she noticed frenzied activity on the side of the freeway. She turned to the scene to see what was happening. "Oh, my...oh, my goodness. David, David look over there. Our car! David look at our car, it's wrecked! Great heavens, look inside the car David, it's us! David, IT'S US!"

It was they. Estelle and David had not survived the accident. The driver of the eighteen wheeler had not seen their tiny, black car.

"David, can this be true, are we really dead? That's my body in the car. David, I see my body in the car. How long have we been dead, David?"

"I don't know, but I didn't see the white light. This death stuff is

nothing like I have read." said David.

"How can this be? I don't feel dead. I have to be hallucinating. We can't be dead, can we? Oh, but we must be dead. Look at your body David, it's cut in two."

"Thank you for that small detail, Estelle, now can you hush for a minute. It's hard enough to deal with the fact that I'm dead without listening to your questions!"

"Well, excuse me. I'm sorry, but this dying stuff is new to me too, you know. I'm trying to deal with the situation at hand. What am I going to tell Mom.....Mom and Dad. My God they're gonna find out soon!"

"Estelle, hold on don't panic. The paramedics don't know who we are. Your body hasn't been extracted from our vehicle. We haven't been searched for personal items yet."

"We need to tell our parents before these paramedics do. These people can be cold and impersonal. My parents would be destroyed to hear about my death from a total stranger. David, we have to tell our parents ourselves."

"Excuse me, but how are we gonna do that? We are dead. Oh, yeah I know, we can find some white sheets, drape them over us and walk into your mom's living room and break the news gently. That is after they regain consciousness from fainting at the sight of us. Estelle, we cannot communicate with the living."

"I know, smart-ass. I'm so stressed out. I can't believe my life is over. I'm only twenty-four years old, at least I was. We were planning to have children and buy a house. Why did this happen to us David?"

"Look at the bright side."

"What bright side? We didn't even see the light while passing through to eternity land."

"No, silly, we're here together. You and I, just like we planned when we were married three years ago. We're here together probably for eternity."

"You're right. You are absolutely right, but I guess this means we can't go to Disneyland next week like we planned, huh?"

"Nope I guess not, unless God's got some development plans for heaven."

Estelle and David's parents were notified later that night. It was now their job to make sure their children had proper burials. Estelle's mother, Kate, chose a white casket with pink satin lining and bedding on the inside, "She was my oldest, but forever my baby." she told the mortician. David's mom chose a black coffin. She decided to bury him in his wedding tux, "He was always a handsome boy, but on his wedding day he was

simply beautiful." she told her husband.

Estelle and David were to be buried one week after the accident. The night before the burial, the two families hosted the wake. Estelle and David were displayed in their coffins side by side. Relatives and friends came to pay their respects.

"I can't believe how many people are here for us. It's a sold out house tonight, baby. Estelle, Estelle. Where are you?"

"I'm over here dear. Yeah, we sold out the house all right. As a matter of fact-over by your casket- is one of your groupies, Brenda. May I ask why is your ex-girlfriend here? I thought you hadn't spoken to her in ten years. Would you like to explain yourself, Casanova? You know David, I don't want to spend eternity with a two-timing, lying, cheating..."

"Will you relax. It 's been over ten years since I last spoke to Brenda. Can I help it if my charm keeps them coming back? But seriously, I have no control over who comes to my funeral. I can't help it if I was a popular guy. Anyway, I'm dead remember? It's not like I can go out with her anymore."

"All right, that's enough Mr. Popularity."

"Hey, I see a few of your extra special friends too, so don't..."

"I said all right already."

The evening wore on. By the end of the night only the family was left. One by one, each member of their families went up to the caskets to have last words with Estelle and David. Estelle's brothers and sisters prayed for her to have a serene life in heaven. David's siblings told him they were sure they would be reunited with him in the afterlife. Estelle's father gave her a kiss on the cheek, "I love you my princess. Take care of us from heaven. Until we meet again." David's dad said, with tears in his eyes, "You never let me down, son. I will always remember and cherish the memories of our times together: the first time I threw a baseball to you, the way you looked at me when I told you about the birds and the bees...Oh, baby boy, I'm gonna miss you. Your mom, she can't see you, son. She's not taking your death very well. She loves you. Goodbye son, you'll be missed. I love you." He kissed David's forehead and left.

Kate walked in next. She dropped to her knees and let out a cry. A cry that she had been containing in her breast all night. "Estelle, my baby. Why God, why her? She was my life, how will I go on? Oh, my, oh, my. My family is not complete. Why? What did I do that was so wrong that you punished me this way? I would die myself to bring her back. Mothers are not made to bury their children. I can't go on living, Estelle, every breath I take hurts my whole body. Estelle, can you hear me, princess? My heart, my head, I hurt all over, Estelle. Estelle." Kate

hugged Estelle, kissed her, caressed her. Estelle looked down at her mother. She cried for her mother. She wanted to reassure her that she was fine.

"David, how can I tell her that I'm fine, that you're with me? That all is tranquil here in the afterlife. That the hardest part of dying is leaving my family behind. How can I tell her this?"

The moment she asked David this question a man with a white beard appeared and answered, "I've heard that you can haunt dreams to get messages to the living." He bowed to them and floated away. Estelle and David looked at each other. David asked, "Who was that?"

"I don't know, but that's it. He's right. Mom was always telling me of her dreams about my uncle and grandfather. How they visited her dreams. I thought she was crazy, but they were real. David, I can get into her dreams and let her know I'm all right and that you're here with me. Let's float over to Mom's house. It's ten o'clock at night. She should be asleep by now. Hurry David."

"I'm hurrying. Wait my shoe's untied."

"David please, if you fall you fall. You're not gonna get hurt. You're dead already."

"Fine then. Hey, you know I thought you wouldn't be so bossy in heaven."

"Shut up and hurry."

Estelle and David floated to her mother's house. As Estelle predicted, her mother was asleep. She floated over her head, "Okay, I guess the only way to get into her head is to jump in."

"Just make sure you don't mess with any of her veins or destroy brain matter."

"David, did I ever tell you that you could be very disgusting?"

"Yeah, well, I try."

Pinching her nose and taking a deep breath, Estelle dove into her mother's head. "I have to find that part of the brain that keeps dreams. If only I had paid attention in biology. Wait a minute, I see her dream. It's me. She is dreaming of me as a young girl. I was so adorable. What am I doing crossing the street by myself? Mom, where are you? There's a truck, hey, it's the same truck that killed David and me. The police must have given her a description of the truck. Mom, Mom, I'm okay up here Mom, don't have this nightmare. I've got to talk to get through to her before the truck hits me."

Estelle screamed at the top of her lungs, "Momma, I'm dead but I'm fine. Momma I love you. I know you're feeling lost and you can't help but to question God for what has happened to me, but don't lose faith

because there is another life waiting for us after our human life is over. Momma you think it a cruel fate I've had because I died so young, but I'm fine and David's with me. We're together, just as we had always hoped. Momma don't give up on life. You still have so much to live for. My brothers and sisters, they need you. I'll look out for you, Momma. Don't worry. I love you and I'll be here when your time comes."

As Estelle finished telling her mother what she had come to tell her, Estelle turned to see what fate awaited her in Kate's dream. The little Estelle was still crossing the street when suddenly, the semi-truck turned into a white carriage with twelve horses pulling it. Little Estelle was lifted onto the carriage by the same man with the white beard who had told her about intruding dreams. Little Estelle was smiling down at her mother who was waving at her from the ground across the street. Estelle saw that her mother had a serene smile on her face. Estelle knew her work was done. She pulled herself out of her mother's head, floated above her parents for a moment, and gave each a kiss goodbye. She turned to David who was floating nearby, "I did it David. I told her I was in good hands. I hope she heard me and believes me."

"Good. Mission is completed, Houston. Let's get on with our eternal lives, shall we?"

"Yes, love. Let's do"

You're so phony Estelle, 'let's do' what's that mean?"

"Yeah, what about you, you ex-girlfriend-at-your-funeral-having person. No shame at all."

"Shut up, I only love you."

"Oh yeah,.....me too."

Non-Fiction

The Mark

Every Sunday was the same. "Hurry, we're going to be late," Mom would shout while we ran from the parking lot to the white doors of Saint Marianne's Church. Mass promptly started at 11:15 a.m., but continuing a long-running Garcia tradition, my family always arrived five minutes late.

A family of blond haired, blue eyed men, women, and children-one of only a handful at our Latino dominated parish-sat in front of us. Their faces were familiar because they had been coming to Saint Marianne's as long as we had. This time the family had an extra person with them. He was a young boy, about two or three years older than I. He had short, dirty blond hair (more brown than blond), blue eyes that sparkled with the colorful reflection of the stained glass windows, and buck teeth that made his upper lip entirely cover his lower one. Besides his buck teeth, the boy had another feature I have never been able to erase from my memory: a staring problem.

As the first and second readings were read, he stared. What he stared at was my face and the red mark that stained half of it. I tried to ignore him but could not. Stel tried to distract me by pointing at our napping father who hid behind sunglasses. I could feel the boy's eyes on me and see that my brothers were becoming more and more irritated.

"Turn around," Ralph said, emphasizing each word to command authority. The boy would not. He continued to stare, making me feel like a freak. I could not take it. During the Lord's Prayer, tears began to fill my eyes and blur my sight. I tilted my head upward to count the painted beams of wood that formed the high, arching, white ceiling. One, two, three, four...why was he staring at me? Why couldn't he turn around? Stel had stuck her tongue out at him three times, so why was he still looking? That trick always worked, but this time it didn't. 'Just make it through this prayer and everything will be okay,' I repeated in my head. Like everyone else, I prayed, "As we forgive those who trespass against us and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. Amen..."

"Turn around you ugly little kid," Mom said at the end of the prayer. I turned to look at her and saw that she was staring at him in the same way he had been staring at me.

"Ignore him, Mia," Mom whispered to me, but how could I? How

could I ignore feeling those blue eyes on my face? Even though he no longer stared, I knew that in his mind the image of the girl with the red stuff on her face was still there. I knew that I was not a freak, that I didn't have three heads and that I was not different from him, but his stare made me feel different. How could Mom tell me to ignore him when she was not the one with the red marks on her face? Nobody could understand what it was like to be me. Even I could not understand why God had given me the red stain and why I had been made to suffer.

I had always seen the church as a safe haven where all was supposed to be just. Mom, Dad, and two years of Saturday morning catechism had taught me that God was a loving being who cared for each individual and frowned on the evils of sin. But in a place where all persons were equal in the eyes of God, I learned what it meant to be different. How could God, the one who loved all, give me this mark, one that caused so much anger, sadness, and self-pity? Had the birthmark been given to me for a reason? Was it part of a greater plan, designed specifically for me and no one else? I did not know what God's intentions were, but did know that the mark I bore was one that would affect my life forever.

II

The object of long, hard stares and endless tears is a bright red birthmark that to this day sporadically covers one half of my face. Medically speaking, the stain is a vascular birthmark. The red marks are benign tumors lying at the surface of my skin. Of the two types of vascular birthmarks, the strawberry mark which is slightly raised, and the port wine stain which is flat, I have the latter.

When I was a baby, it partially covered half of my upper lip and encircled my right eye. But as I grew and my facial structure changed, the birthmark also moved to its present position. It no longer encircles my eye. The only stain that remains near my eye is a small patch on the outer corner. The birthmark slightly touches a small section of the outline of my upper lip and ends at the beginning of my right nostril. Towards my ear and continuing down to the corner of my mouth are three separate blotches of red skin. These three blotches descend in order: the largest closest to my ear, the mid-sized one in the center, and the smallest lying close to my mouth. A small area of "normal" looking skin, about half an inch wide, separates this section from the one under my nose.

The biggest section of my birthmark starts at my lower right eyelid and blends into the area closest to my nose and lip. This large block of broken capillaries dominates my cheek. Another gap of "normal" skin runs vertically, dividing this section from the three-blotch section, but

this gap is a small one. Although the blotches vary in size and shape, they all have the same coloring. This shade of pink is like the color of the rash a baby gets when he has worn a wet diaper for too long. When I was in junior high school, a boy once thought that my birthmark was actually a mass of hickeys. Yet these were not temporary. They would not fade away with time or with the help of old wives' tales, such as twisting a lipstick cap on it or pressing a frozen spoon against it. These markings were real.

III

After school one day, I went on my usual route home. This included a short cut through the-junior high that was on the other side of my school. Walking through the main hallway of the campus, I made my way to the chain link fence that encircled and guarded the school. Just around the block was my home. Along the gray fence stood a boy who waited for the school bus. He and the boy next to him had decided to leave sixth period early because they were the only ones there. As I exited the gate and passed the boys, I heard one of them say something. He pretended to be discrete, but was intentionally loud enough for me to hear him.

"Look at Scar-face. How gross."

I kept walking as if I hadn't heard him, but inside my heart pounded while my head was clouded with the words I had just heard.

"Scar-face, Scar-face, Scar-face..." spun through my head as I walked and tried to disguise my hurt.

This time I was alone. My friends were not there to say, "Don't feel sad. I don't even notice your birthmark," or "I forgot you even had a birthmark." This boy reminded me that I was different. I was not like everyone else. Instead I had a big, ugly, red mark on my face and I hated it.

When I finally made it to my house I told my mom what had just occurred. Mom comforted me as best as she could. She patted my head and said, "Ya no llores. Yo te quiero mucho. Dios también te quiere mucho y no te da lo que no puedes mantener. Todo va salir mejor...Don't cry any more. I love you very much. God also loves you very much and does not give you any problem you cannot handle. Everything will be okay."

Mom's words were comforting. But a week later, Mom, my sister, and I went to a big-name department store to find a temporary solution to my problem.

IV

It was at one of the many make-up counters at May Company that I found the first in a long line of products I would buy and use to conceal my birthmark. Although Dermablend had been on the market for many years, I had never heard of it. The woman behind the counter praised the product. She received a huge commission when we left the store with a tube of concealer, a container of finishing powder, and a bottle of make-up remover.

I was so excited thinking about how great it would be to hide my birthmark. Following the directions, Stel evenly applied small amounts of cream to my "facial distortions," as the cosmetics sales person had called it. Using a fluffy brown puff, she applied the white talcum finishing powder. When she had finally finished, I looked in the mirror and saw that my birthmark had been replaced with a caked-on mess. It did not look all that bad, but it was obvious that a girl of nine was wearing too much make-up. A few weeks after buying the Dermablend, I wore it in front of my aunts, uncles, and cousins at a Christmas party.

"Is Josie wearing make-up?"

"Why is Josie wearing make-up?"

Mom explained to them that I had been called Scar-face. They all whispered a long, collective "Ohhhh."

As the school year came to an end, I outgrew the daily application of Dermablend. It looked too unnatural and I felt even more uncomfortable with it on. Yet buying the three products was not a waste of money; my sister used it to conceal the pimples that invaded her face and threatened her social life.

'If my problem was a few pimples, life would be so much easier,' I used to think while watching Stel apply the concealer onto her clean, dark complexion. Her face was a thing of beauty, mine was not. But the end of my Dermablend days, and the end of the school year, signaled a coming time of escape.

V

Veronica was not a popular girl, but did have her position in one of the cool cliques. The main reason she was seen as cool was because of her height. Skying over us petite girls, Veronica's height made her look older than thirteen. We became friends. During our final year at Rivera we were placed in the same physical education class. Volleyball was the first of many sports we were obligated to play. Looking at the class roster to see who was on my team, Veronica's name appeared.

'Oh, good, somebody I know,' I thought.

"Look, we're on the same team," Veronica squealed.

Weeks passed and we continued to play volleyball. Because Veronica was so tall, our team won most of the competitions. During one game, a volley had been in progress for a long time. Back and forth the dirty white ball flew over the old, torn net. Veronica hit the ball over to the opposing team, and they returned the ball by whacking it back. But in that exchange, the volley stopped. Flying over to our side, the ball landed on my face. My head jerked back as it landed, stinging my skin. I shook my head, looked at Veronica, and heard her say through her laughter,

"Well, at least all of your face is red now."

Veronica later apologized, but the damage had already been done.

VI

The eighth grade was supposed to be my final year of easy classes before making the giant leap into high school. Instead, it was filled with hours of red laser beams zapping my pale face.

In my sister's 1967 Mustang, Mom, Stel, and I would drive to the land of the rich and beautiful, Santa Monica, every two weeks. In a high rise office building, we were the only Mexicans in Dr. Abergel's office besides the cleaning lady. The waiting room had a black leather couch that Stel and I competed for in order to be the first one to have the pleasure of sitting on it. When it came time to get my treatment, she always got the leather couch while I got the vinyl-covered medical chair.

The blue vinyl chair was the only thing with color in the white equipment filled room. From the walls to the vertical blinds and machinery, everything looked as if it had been painted white. In the room, Dr. Abergel, in his white scrubs, would hand me a pair of goggles to protect my eyes from the laser's rays. Mom sat in on the sessions and also wore the spaceman looking goggles. With the protective gear in place, Dr. Abergel would start the most painful part of the treatment: numbing my face to avoid the sting of the laser. The syringe filled with anesthesia felt like a knife's stab as its needle penetrated through my right cheek. At every session, this process was performed and with every stab, my eyes filled with tears. After this procedure, the lights would dim, making the room almost completely dark. The laser's red beam was the only visible color in the black room.

Each touch of the laser's beam felt like a stitching needle was poking my face. Each poke stung more and more as laser hit skin. I sat through the laser zapping for a half hour each session, after which the burned areas looked a pale brown. After four or five sessions, my birthmark

changed from being a bright red to a creamy pink. Just when my wish was finally coming true, I stopped the treatment.

The process was too expensive and too painful. My birthmark had lightened, but our money was running out. I felt guilty that Dad was spending six hundred dollars a session and would have to spend much more in the future. But those were not the only reasons why I stopped seeking laser surgery. It felt wrong to completely erase something I had had my entire life. Even though I questioned how God could have given me such a thing, I was attached to it and could not take away what God had given. Whether I liked it or not, the birthmark was a part of me and I was going to have to deal with it.

VII

I entered my first year in high school with the same feeling of nervousness and apprehension I had always experienced whenever the first day of school rolled around. Every year I would wake up early with a bad stomach ache. This year was worse, though, because I was a freshman at El Rancho High School. I had disliked junior high kids so much during my three years at Rivera that I expected the kids at "the Ranch" to be the same. But I was wrong. Somehow, over the summer, the kids matured. Maybe all of the other freshmen were feeling like me, scared of being in such a big, different place. Or maybe they just didn't care. Whatever was the case, through my four years in high school, I never suffered the agony of hard stares and name calling.

At the end of my senior year, I graduated in the top twelve of the 530 graduation seniors. I left high school with self-esteem and confidence, and entered college with a positive outlook. But an off-campus experience during my first week of college made my confidence fall and altered my perception of people.

VIII

During my first week in college I met many people who I consider my closest friends. That week was also filled with classes, lectures, and reading assignments that seemed to never end. When Friday came, I was ready to go home. My sister picked me up in her yellow Mustang and instead of going home, we went to Old Town Pasadena to walk around with the hundreds of other people who had the same idea. Walking up and down Colorado Boulevard, Stel and I looked at windows that displayed items we longed to have, but could never afford. Continuing to stroll to another window, I heard a mumbled voice say,

"Did somebody slap you?"

I heard the voice, but because Stel and I weren't sure what it was saying or to who, we continued to walk along the boulevard. The voice came again and this time I heard every word it uttered,

"Did somebody slap you?"

"No," I said, turning around to meet the face that came with the voice. Standing before me was a short, beer-bellied guy with kinky-curly, blond hair and blood-shot eyes. He wore jeans shorts and a dirty white T-shirt. Standing next to him was another guy, his friend I assumed, who I cannot describe. All I am able to remember is the guy who spoke to me. With a half smirk, the guy with the blond afro asked me another question, "Then why is your face all red?"

Immediately I felt my face and body get hot with anger. My eyes filled with tears as I pointed my finger in his face and yelled, "Don't you ever make fun of someone who's different!" Oblivious to my surroundings, I ran away as I heard my sister say, "You ass-hole!" and the guy apologize, "I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I didn't know."

People would never look past my birthmark. It would always be the first thing they saw whenever they saw me. I could not escape the face that I had something that made me different and because of it, would have to suffer humiliating episodes like this one for the rest of my life.

When we got home, I told my mom what had happened. I cried as I described the experience and questioned why I had been born this way. Instead of comforting me, Mom did something she had never done. She too began to cry and said, "I feel so bad because I gave birth to you this way. What did I do to make you be born with a birthmark? What did I do? I'm sorry." I had never thought that Mom had been so riddled with guilt. Like me, she questioned herself and God. I felt bad for making her cry because I knew she had done nothing wrong. Mom was not to blame for my birthmark, nature was.

From that day, I decided to never again mention my birthmark in front of my mother. Never did I want to make her feel guilt or see her cry. Mom did not deserve that for she had raised me in the warmth of her arms and love of her heart. I loved my mother too much to let her see me sad.

IX

All of my life I had tried to hide my face from the world. The goal to conceal the pink stain heightened. Laser surgery was out of the question because I could not afford it. Once again I turned to the world of make-up concealers. What I wanted was a clean-semi-natural look. I learned that in order to achieve this, I had to do one of two things. First, I had to

go green.

While watching a talk show segment on make-overs, I learned that with blemishes redness was neutralized with a green base concealer. After watching the show I had to try it. I bought a seven dollar tube of green concealer and carefully applied it. Applying the concealer was an art in itself. I had learned that in order to avoid blotching, I needed to dab and never rub it on. Doing this produced a balanced look. The green dabs were followed by a bit of liquid base to cover the area, and then press powder. Although the birthmark was still somewhat noticeable, this process became a part of my disappearing formula. The other thing I had to do came with the power of my hair.

By parting my hair to the right and by having it cut so that it would fall in my face and still look stylish, I was able to hide the three blotches of birthmark that started at my ear and ended near my lips. Whenever anyone looked at me, I was sure to toss my hair forward to conceal the mark as best as I could. I never wore my hair up or out of my face in front of anyone I did not trust. Only my family and a few close friends saw me without make-up or with my hair pulled back. Even with all of these tricks, I was not happy. If I did not hide my birthmark, I feared being humiliated. At the same time, I didn't like the fact that I had to hide who I really was. But who was I and why had I been given a mark that would forever be a part of me? All I wanted was to find and accept myself.

X

Sunday afternoons after mass were revered as a day of rest-the day of the Sabbath. With the newspaper lying on our large oak dining table, I picked out my favorite sections and leafed through the piles of coupons, sports articles, and news stories. Flipping through the pages of a Los Angeles Times Magazine I stopped at a picture of a L.A Dodger player and a title that read, "The Face of Individuality." Like mine, the baseball player's face was different. It startled me to see such an image. He wore a batting helmet on his head and a bat slung over his shoulder. His eyes gazed into a far away direction, as if he had just hit a home run and was watching it fly into the bleachers.

Reading the one-page article about the player took about an hour. Literally, it wasn't difficult reading, but emotionally it was difficult for me to get through. I cried as he described what it felt like to be stared at and the reactions he and his birthmark elicited, from curiosity to concern, rudeness to shock, and even mockery. I cried when he described the many tricks he employed to conceal what nature had given him, such as facing people with the side without the mark so that they saw the better,

good looking profile. I identified with him because I too had often felt ugly.

Like him, I had employed various means in order to futilely conceal my mark. Each of us had corrective surgery, yet while my face remained smooth, his had been scarred because his birthmark was much different than mine. Instead of having a red mark, had had been born with a congenital hairy nevus birthmark, in which the right side of his face was covered in hair. Even though the types of birthmarks were different, we had still gone through the same humiliations.

Continuing to read, I felt relieved that someone had put into words the feelings I had never been able to express. Here was someone who knew what it was like to be made fun of because of what lay on his face. He and I shared a bond that only people who are physically different from the rest of the world possess. But he went on to say something I had never been able to say and truly believe. He wanted people to see his birthmark because he was no longer ashamed of it. Instead, it gave him strength; he was proud of his individuality.

I had never thought of my birthmark in this way, for I had always seen it as being a negative that alienated me from the rest of the world. He had shared my feelings, but somewhere along the way he had found his sense of self. Unlike me, he was not afraid to stand out in a crowd. I envied him for that. Reading about his strength, a thought clicked within that made me want to possess it. I knew who I was and who I wanted to be. I was tired of feeling ashamed and wanted to be proud of how I looked. I could no longer be afraid.

That day, for the first time in many years, I pulled back my hair and showed my face to the world.

Jamie Jacobs

Siam: A Princess

I am flying to Southeast Asia, curled unto myself tightly, with my back, blocking the stranger whom I met last month. He is my father. For sixteen hours I sit like this, pretending to sleep. I will not speak to him. I cannot talk about the love he has expressed, through the cards and letters mailed, at least two a day. I did not desire love when I searched for my father, but cosmology, and now that I know my God I suffer. In this plane are memories of why we are here.

I

My mom and dad adopted me near San Francisco when I was two days old. After signing the necessary documents they immediately took me on my first plane flight. I did not cry. I stared while my new parents took me home, to San Diego. Later, while I slept for the first time as someone else's daughter, I was unaware that my new mom was looking at me, unnerved by the blackness of my eyes. She was frightened and thought they were devil eyes because they did not match the blue of her family and husband.

Although a white baby was prayed for, the one available for the cheapest price was half oriental and over the years I would be told I was "chosen." When Daddy learned that a baby girl was born, he refused to love me because of his fear that he would betray his own dead child. While he was fleeing this terror through work and adultery, I would gaze at the oil paintings and photographs, displayed in every bedroom and hallway, of the dead and immortalized, always two and a half years old, red haired and turquoise eyed Jaylene Michelle. Thus I was named Jamie Michelle as a lure, a tribute, a reminder of the fantasies never able to be lived up to.

The parents were proud though. Affirmation was finally achieved by skipping second and sixth grade. They must have acknowledged their physical absence, and the intellectual inertia of our succession of European nannies, for my mind was related to good genes. Certainly my brilliance would get me somewhere considering my glasses and weird features would not. I became used to being called ugly and being "other" and I compensated and escaped through books. I wonder still what created my childhood superiority. Alienation. Neglect.

The face I despised was questioned daily about her nationality and the standardized answer would be "I am half oriental but I don't know what because I was adopted at birth by my German Mom and Jewish Dad." Oriental people would innocuously attempt to place me into their nationality and the standard answer could not emerge. I felt like a traitor to their races, and thus avoided the few people of any color that skimmed my world.

II

I am putting the cacophony of images into a story to pass the sixteen hours, for if I create linear reality along the theme of why I am so confused by my new father, reading the Asian Wall Street Journal next to me, then I will be able to kill the other pictures in my mind . This fear of my new father is eclipsed by the primordial terror of being back-handed so often by Mommy that the scars inflicted from her diamond rings would leave only after a decade of meticulous vitamin E application and the final ability to accept a hug without flinching. And then there's Dad. I feel sorry for the father next to me because he doesn't know about Mommy and Dad who raised me. Parents are the cartographers of their children's lives, creating a map that others travel and rename, and my Dad contributed to mine when he began giving me secret backrubs during the night. He still visits in dreams and I scream at him. But I don't scream at my Asian father. I pretend to sleep, listening to the airplane.

III

I left my parents when I was fifteen. The day after walking down the aisle of Orange High School to accept my diploma, I left. I moved to San Francisco because I wanted to have the rights of an eighteen year old, and that was the only city that disregarded the 255 dollar court filing fee for a minor's emancipation. I moved in with Steven, a twenty-five year old boyfriend who I loved because of the books he gave me. Foucault, Kristeva, Burroughs and Cocteau were in my hand and head while I ate, worked, walked, and underwent court procedures. Six months later I was free and told Steven I didn't need him. I sobbed as he hurled a vase of red roses that shattered, leaving debris of glass shards and petals. Terrified I abandoned him and all of my childhood belongings. I never saw that boyfriend again, but the internal photograph remains of candlelit seafood over Philip Glass' solo piano, in our peach Victorian flat, where I wept because of his brilliance.

The remainder of my teenage years, when thought of self-depracatingly, were a loss of potential, for I came near destroying myself. The

destruction occurred in ways common to the damaged and it was beautiful because it was not total. Desirable fragments of my self were cultivated and nourished in all the cities, apartments, and houses that I traveled while the unwanted results of childhood dissipated. Appreciation was molded by impermanence and I continue to devour people and life because I only possess them momentarily. By age twenty I was beautiful in a way introduced through comments on my external appearance but understood by me as internal joy and clarity. In chic and temporary awe over my exotic bi-racial packaging, companies sought my representation to promote capitalism. Thus began my own financial luxury. Modeling and acting provided a means to achieve the end of education. Actually, Sprite and Levi's gave me a basis of confidence to pursue my only solid and unchanging goal of finding my parents. With money and slight glamour I was a grown-up.

IV

Finding my parents as a grown-up was supposed to be different than as the child whose every wish was to know. Now I know and this stranger taking me to Thailand is just as mysterious as the one in the pennies thrown in fountains, stars fallen out of Nevada skies, candles blown out, bloody teeth put under pillows, and prayed for to the Lord who I was never taught existed. The Lord. Our Father.

Our Father is not the daddy who tucks us into bed and gives piggy back rides. He is the ominous, omniscient creator who we can only guess about. What were His creation motives and circumstances, especially when making little girls to abandon? Who art in heaven. Thy Kingdom Come. Thy will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven. I am now approaching Bangkok. This plane will be landing in a literal kingdom where my father and his will may become my only reality and all the pennies look different.

V

He speaks to me in a rapid accent as we walk out of the plane. I do not let him hold my belongings. Immediately after disembarking I escape into the airport lavatory, where I take my many bags along. Rather than one line forming for the stalls, there are individual lines for each toilet. I want to practice cultural relativity, but I think this method of waiting is inefficient. Once in the stall, I breathe deeply and try to focus on the action of applying lipstick. Exiting the bathroom I smile at my father behind the make-up and he says how much he loves me and how I look just like him. With the contrived smile I approach the large

family my father urges me toward. Automatically I hug everyone without realizing that they don't even hug each other. I then follow his humble example of bowing at the knees while holding the hands as if in prayer. I emulate Thailand's sawathikah greeting and begin to cry.

I am crying because I understand only their nod and look of somber indifference as my father introduces the adult daughter unacknowledged until last week. I am again a child, newborn, unable to communicate except through tears, but my tears aren't comforted. He did not tell these grandparents, aunts and uncles, until last week that I existed and while they have been a family, unaware that anything was missing, I have been alone- yet I never felt alone until this moment, surrounded by the Asians who look like me.

VI

It is hot here in Bangkok. The heat is of a kind I have never felt and it sticks to me, wet and nourishing. An aunt and uncle guide me into their new Mercedes where we drive forever into the outskirts of the city. They explain to me that Bangkok is dirty, filled with traffic and prostitution, but they are lucky to be rich. They are lucky to have family. They explain to me that the family consists of Koonjah and Koonpah and their eight children, and their children's children. After much gesticulation I learn that I have four aunts and three uncles. Of the men there is a doctor, an engineer, an importer, and my father, who does income tax and immigration in America. While stuck in the unmoving midnight traffic the engineer tells me his sisters are all sooway. They won beauty contests as teenagers and all have graduated from university. Two went on for master's degrees in Japan, and now all stay home and raise their children. The oldest daughter is in architecture school and the oldest son is in a London high school.

My uncle laughs because now I am "the oldest child in the family from the oldest son. The most important daughter, and an actress too". I explain that I have never taken an acting class but was discovered by an agent in Hollywood and recently returned from filming something in Toronto, Canada. What I don't explain is that I never aspired to act but was persuaded, by money, because of my ability to mold myself into what others need. I become what others want and believe what they make me into. I become pretty or enchanting by others and then by believing I am enchanting, I actually become that. I can become somebody else's daughter and emerge twenty years later as yet another's. Here I will believe that I am Thai and that I am my father's daughter.

My uncle and I have nothing else to say to each other so I look out of

the window at this country. There are buildings unfinished, in perfect rows. The cars immobile around us, are Lexus', BMW's, Cadillac's and they are framed by the buildings beyond. Very few are complete, but they are all on the grand scale of modern industrial design. We are off the highway and our vehicle is reflected in a mirrored edifice. The reflection of ourselves is exact and the building is comparable to a skyrise in New York, but when I tilt my head up I see that it is only half constructed. Uncle Win explains that because the baht was declining, people designed and built as quickly as possible out of fear. Today baht floated and the buildings will never be complete. I see myself in the mirror of the building. I also see destitution shadowed by this unfinished grandeur. Now that we are out of Bangkok, in a city whose name I won't remember, there are wild dogs and children with lesions running around great piles of refuse. People wearing bandannas, to mask the odor of the luxury cars, and bright garments, hold up durian and rambuhtan to sell. The fruit looks like animals and the vendors like revolutionaries.

I feel guilty for being terrified and when we drive this way again, weeks later, I give the women and children chocolate. They pull down their bandannas and smile, with teeth that I hope won't be imperfected by the sugar. These people look happier from my gift of chocolate than I have for the duration of my father's gift of this country.

We pass through poverty into gates guarded by men with machine guns. The house I will spend this month in is a palace on the River Nam and although it is monsoon season it will hardly rain. My bedroom faces the river and my father's bedroom faces mine.

I cannot walk around the river or into town because I am a girl and half white. Unable to speak my own language reinforces the native belief that I am only "half good", but my half bad side is what is alluring. I am enticing because my eyes are large and almond gold and my features are an amalgamation of two continents: small nose, full lips, aureate skin. I am the smallest in this family, at a precise five feet and the clothes I choose make me look like a doll. The Burmese maid plaits my dyed mahogany hair into two French braids and I put on a white summer dress. I go to the balcony to gaze at the River Nam. My father appears frightening me with his sudden appearance.

My father is wearing only a white towel, wrapped around his waist, and glasses. He is fifty five and cannot move his head because of a car accident when he was young. His neck is stiff and his hairless body sags. He takes my hand in his and tells me how pretty my nail polish is. It is the same color as my hair and toenails. He looks at my pedicured feet. He looks at my breasts.

"I love you too much", he says, "and they lie to me and take you away".

I know that he loves me too much because the letters he mailed say what a father should not. I turn so that he cannot see what he wants to look at. I expect him to tell me how soft my skin is, like he does in the cards that have hearts and lace, but instead he recounts our story.

"Twenty years ago, when first in America I have girlfriend. She only seventeen but I love her. She stop returning my phone calls and it make me sad, but what can I do? Months later Julia call me and say to meet her in front of merry-go-round. I go meet her and she already big. Her belly big and it's mine she says. I offer her money to take care of things but I know it's too late. I big man so I take care of my responsibility you know? I will marry you and we raise baby. She says no. I say I'm oldest son in Thailand and my baby very important. She says she already handle things. I don't know what she mean by word adoption, but I find out it means lies."

I hear this story every day. He tells me in this house with guards. He relates the same words, intonation, and loss on the balcony, in the gardens, on every piece of teak and rosewood furniture carved with cranes and lotus blossoms. If I interject with my own version, or interrupt with an idea about the current political situation in Cambodia under Hun Sen, he says:

"They come to my work. I work in factory and my English not so good. I came to America to go to school and they come to my work with papers to sign. I was so scared. I sign papers because they promise me that I see my baby. They promise me. I never even see my baby but they tell me I have daughter. I never have more children. I only think about my own daughter and how she doing, if she alive or sick, if she very tall or pretty."

VII

I think about my father when I am five. I know that I am the daughter of an oriental prince and princess. I look through wooden shutters in the living room, waiting to see my royal parents walk up to the house. They don't show up in their finery because I have to learn a lesson. It hurt these ghosts to know that the people they gave me to are mean, but the ghosts gave me to them on purpose so that I would grow up like Cinderella and be sweet.

I only look out the window for my real parents to come pick me up when Mommy is screaming at Daddy because he bought a car for another slut or was caught sleeping with a secretary. I am not angry at the prince, even when crying Mommy comes and screams at me for biting

the shutters. I have destroyed custom designed wood shutters, with my little teeth marks in rows all along the soft creamy panels. When Mommy shrieks and calls me bad words and throws me against the wall it hurts a lot and I cry but it's not the oriental prince and princess' fault. I'm not mad at them, but glad that they gave me to these mean people because it is all for a reason.

I know that my family loves me. I know that Mommy will see me bleeding from her red nails and diamonds and sob at my feet that it's all my goddamn Daddy's fault and she's sorry. As I put my arms around weeping Mommy, I know that the prince and princess are putting their arms around me.

VIII

My father was a benevolent oriental prince when I was five and then he ceased to exist. The prince was usurped when I got older. The postulation being that in order for the pregnant women to give up a child (unless under the circumstances of war, poverty, or famine), the impregnator must be a rapist, abandoner, or mentally ill substance abuser. Unable to accept the fantasies that would ensue under such theories, I abandoned the father and internally victimized the mother, so that I would not have to live with anger or rejection.

When I was eighteen I unearthed a mother who was not a victim. From her I learned the name of the man, my father, who was.

IX

spend my days silent. We don't sightsee, but stay inside of the enormous house, barefoot. Various relatives come to look at me and the only thing any of them will say in English is, "You and father look the same." They don't say that I am pretty because I am not. My nails are now broken and the polish chipped. I have cut my hair jagged and it is no longer mahogany but a faded orange. In photographs my smile is a grimace that exaggerates the wrinkles around my eyes and my misquito bites which are bleeding scabs.

I spend my nights drinking Singha under yoon gat netting waiting for my father to come into the bedroom. "You so soft and delicate, like child but with hips and thighs like woman. Oh how I love you. You just like me. We the same. Only two people in the world. Father and daughter." He massages tiger balm into my wounds. The touch is sensuous and the wounds everywhere. It only ends when I leap out of bed into the bathroom, locking the door behind me. He leaves because he can hear me coughing violently or retching.

The feel of the father's inappropriate hands over my skin connotes sensations of the touch by the daddy who raised me. It is here, in this bedroom overlooking the lake, where I smell the misquito coils burning. The incense scent is new yet pleasant. The intentions under this man's fingertips, the furtive breathing, the violation and lust to violate more, is not new and it makes me vomit behind closed doors.

X

My peaceful sleep is drowned by chaotic nightmares. The subconscious realm has become a place as lived as the conscious and I wake up sore and exhausted. During slumber I ride the number thirty three bus, with Steven, into the Mission district of San Francisco. He hurls objects at me and I do not want to leave him. I fly up and away into the air, like a mermaid swims. I always leave him. The nightmares come in different forms. Terror. Faceless men come to rape me. My teeth fall out one after the other, or choose instead to shatter all at once and leave only blood in my mouth. Penitence. Steven and all of the other lovers. The worst is grief. Grief is to live my life over again during sleep, which is like death, here in Asia.

Each night it's the same except my father becomes angrier while I become thinner. Although I eat sticky rice and alcohol mixed with the milk of baby coconuts I am thinner. My father changes too. His hair is longer and oily and his mustache spills down over his lip. "I big man you know. I make money in America but America stupid because it take my daughter away. And now I leave wife to be with you." I drown out his bitter monotony by listening to the sounds of the river outside and the shrieks of the foreign birds or bugs. It is incomprehensible that I am really here so I pretend that I am in the deep south, visualizing the words I once read of cicadas, red earth, bougainvillea, song. I imagine that I am in Costa Rica with monkeys, lowland rainforests, fish cooking and black sand. I remember my old best friend's garden filled with passion fruit vines, avocado treehouse with rats over the compost pile, big poodles and a real life tin canoe in the swimming pool, puffing out our bikini tops to see who had bigger boobies.

Remembering what my reality is I recognize it is here, in this city outside of Bangkok, that I need to revel in. This man next to me is to be absorbed the way I absorb a book or a country or my best friend who moved away. Thailand is my father, both broken down by ideals of America. His desire to feel my body expresses his need to penetrate an unaccepting culture. My father sees himself when he gazes into my eyes.

One evening, he exclaims that, "we go out". He has brought me a

green ao dai. Although my father is Thai, his wife is Vietnamese and the traditional outfit was once hers. The ao dai is rainforest green with clear and white sequined applique designs. The pattern of falling lotus blossoms envelopes me and I almost think that I am beautiful, like a princess. The color of the ao dai makes my hair look blacker and my skin, whiter. Before leaving, I actually twirl in front of my father, wearing red lipstick. It is as if I am acting in a foreign movie, filmed on location, in Thailand.

We travel together, in a taxi, to Patpong. The streets are swarming with tourists, gazing at my exotic ao dai authenticity with admirable interest. My father hurriedly leads me through the crowd. There is no time to examine the booths and stalls filled with oriental kitsch: jade Buddha's and boddhisatvas, lucky cats, hookahs, and switchblades. I wonder if this is the Asian experience, or if it is a created panorientalism by and for tourists. I am panoriental. I am a geisha in Vietnamese clothing pushing my way through Patpong incense and live chickens.

I don't know why we are walking so fast, but the throng and humidity are making me sweat profusely. Suddenly we are on a cobblestone path that is narrow and away from the turmoil. In order to enter a hidden, metal door we step over a man. He brings me to a despicable reality. The sense of intrigue halts abruptly when I see that he has no fingers or toes, and the flesh on his face has disappeared, leaving only a nasal cavity and vague sense of eye sockets. His hands are moving but the fingers are stumps, cut off at the first joint, with white bones protruding. The toes are the same. I have never been witness to leprosy or unattended, abandoned AIDS and I despise myself because I do not feel pity for this man. I don't reach down to comfort him or rush to bring water or love. I abhor this revolting scene and cower from this harmless almost-corpse. I want to call 911 and recoil from a distance.

It is at this moment that I recognize I am an American. I have never had to feel compassionate. When my friends feel the repercussions of AIDS they are hospitalized. When my grandmothers age they have special homes to go to. When a car explodes before me at 3 a.m. on the 101 South freeway, and I stop with the intentions of helping, and it is engulfed in flames feet away, I see three men die, but it is the expression of death masks through the glass of a windshield. I am shielded from death as I am through the television screen that flaunts murder and rape. I know this man will die within moments because he is moaning a primordial agony that I have only been aware of through American movies and Latin American novels. I could hold up his body of blood and bones, or cover him with my ao dai as I pray to Christ and the moon goddess. I could scream up into the heavens to God who hast forsaken us, but

instead I walk over him through the metal doors.

I walk into a brothel. My father looks me up and down as if he is drunk and angry. I look around and the women are all ages, wearing an array of costuming, from white wedding dresses to black vinyl mini-skirts. Every female in the entire establishment, except for me, is wearing a piece of paper, with a number written in black, a raven number, pinned over her breast. The only men, besides my father, are older, white, and heavyset.

My father explains that this place is very exclusive and private. Then he leaves me standing alone as he walks up to a young women, in an almost identical rainforest green ao dai. He hands her money and they dance. His hands are over her entire body, which looks like mine, as he stares into my eyes. He sees me as the image of a woman he once made love to; the woman who is regret. He kisses this prostitute with his tongue as he looks at me. He sees a trinity complete with the ghost of a daughter made holy from the guilt of what I was or could have been if I had existed.

I want to retch again. I let an old man buy me a pernod to drink and put his arm around me as I smoke Chinese cigarettes. I am shaking as I watch my father lead the nineteen-year-old girl to a sofa. He lays her down underneath him, as his gaze is fixated to mine. He sees the holy trinity of me, my mother in me, and the ghost of me. I want to throw my pernod with violence, but anger confuses me. I lift up the glass, shaking several times and then just drop it to the floor and run out of the metal doors, ignoring my bloody guilt, dead under my feet. Rain is pouring down and I scream and run, looking like just another whore in Patpong, raped or gone crazy from drugs and being fucked and fucked over too often. While I run I am not afraid. I welcome malaria, dengue fever, and the knives in my heart from whoever wants to pierce me. I claw my skin. The monsoon nourishes me and drowns out my shrieks and mixes with my salvia and tears. I run. She runs. She runs far away and thinks of mermaids and cicadas. We wail and rip our skin and hair as we run far, far away.

Karen Lindell

Inside the Window

Hunger is a way of persons outside windows / the entering takes away - Emily Dickinson

She is standing in the dark outside the window, watching. A bulky sweatshirt, baggy sweats and down jacket hid her way-too-thin frame. Despite her heavy clothing and the balmy evening spring air, she shivers. And she is very, very hungry.

She stops by one-story house most nights on her evening walk through the neighborhood. The wide front window, so open and inviting, frames the world inside. She doesn't mean to spy, but is drawn to the warmth and camaraderie the three companions-two women and a man-seem to share.

It's dinnertime, and the three enter the dining room. The room is plain, with unadorned walls and only a simple wooden table. But the atmosphere is far from sterile. Two tapered candles in silver holders on the table glow gently, radiating light onto the warm yellow walls, and bright blue plates and bowls have been set lovingly on the table.

As usual the wine comes first. The man pours it slowly into delicate glass goblets with the most fragile of stems. The diners sip slowly, taking turns talking, leaning forward and backward in their chairs in the give-and-take of laughter and conversation.

Outside, she wipes away tears and wraps her jacket closer around her body.

When the wine glasses are about half-full, one of the women walks out of the room and returns with the beginning of the meal: A long loaf of rustic bread and salad in wooden bowls. She tosses the crispy green lettuce, drizzling it with vinegar and oil. All three tear off large pieces of the crusty bread, spreading each hunk with softened butter.

Outside, she holds her stomach, trying to ignore the familiar dull ache that is starting to pound.

They linger what seems an achingly long time over the first course, at times just sitting back and sipping wine as the conversation turns. Then comes the main dish. What will it be tonight? The man disappears for a few minutes and returns with a large tureen from the unseen kitchen. He sets it down and begins to slowly ladle piping hot soup into

bowls. As steam rises in wispy tendrils, the three companions hold a spoonful tantalizingly close to their lips, blowing gently to cool the hot liquid.

The candles burn brighter as they each take that first glorious taste. And they continue to talk and laugh as they eat, savoring each mouthful of soup and using their chinks of bread to soak up the last drops.

Outside, she has watched long enough, sharing in this virtual meal that could be so real but is just a dream for her. She turns away from the lighted window to walk back home, picking up the pace although she hasn't much energy.

The trees that line the street, so tall and stately during the day, loom menacingly large at night. The dimmed street lamps are too high up to guide her with anything more than a glimmer.

Her hunger intensifying as she nears her own little apartment, she notices the glow emanating from the windows of the other homes on the street, beacons of shimmering brightness illuminating the dark.

Suddenly, she is determined that tonight will be different. She will eat oil-laced greens and a bowl of hot soup and slabs of warm bread, instead of measuring vegetables in minute portions, too afraid to taste or feel.

I am home. There is no one in my apartment, but I have left the light on, and can see my little table and chair framed in the window, waiting. I am hungry.

Jacqueline Martin

Father's Shoes: A Lasting Impression

"What is it about you and shoes?"

My husband's strong voice had such an exasperated sound to it that I jerked out of my towering rage. My husband and son, had, as usual, left their old tennis shoes scattered throughout the lounge. And I, as usual, had become enraged at the sight of them. These offerings conjured up such insane depths of feelings in me that I always felt ashamed and miserable at my uncontrolled outbursts. Today I had gone too far: I threw the shoes as hard as I could through the front door. They bounced and then tottered down the steps.

"Well?"

I am sure I had a stupid look on my face. I just stood there. I, who always enjoyed stringing and slinging words around, stood silent. It was one of those illuminating moments that arrive at intervals in a lifetime. It is like the moment when the theater curtain rises to reveal a scene in a play or an opera. There on the stage is a complete scene, with characters ready to speak their lines. Every piece of furniture, every angle of the set, every ornament is vividly familiar. The scene is of another time and place.

I was about ten years old and living in another country. It was dinnertime.

"Quickly, I hear your father's key in the door."

My sister and I raced down the hallway just as the door opened. We gave and received our customary hugs, then stood to one side as our parents hugged and kissed briefly on the lips. Most of the year it would be cold and Father would smell of cigarettes and his cheeks and coat would feel frosty. Mother would always build a good fire for his return. On my return home from school, it was my job to put the family slippers by the hearth to warm. Father's slippers were laid on their sides, heel to heel and placed horizontally in the middle of the hearth. Next came Mother's shoes which were placed on either side of his, then mine, and lastly my little sister's slippers at either edge of the hearth.

Father entered the lounge, sat in his chair, and untied his shoelaces. He took off the brown shoes into which he carefully eased silver shoetrees. He reached down onto the hearth where his slippers were warming. He pulled them on, stretched out his legs, gave a deep sigh and

opened his newspaper. This ritual was enacted five days a week. I used to wonder how it would feel if my slippers occupied the best frontal position.

During the short English summer, Father's slippers would remain in the closet under the stairs until I would be called upon to get them for him. I hated getting his slippers in summer time, as I had to open the dark stair cupboard, which always smelt a little dank, and to find them I had to rummage around the Wellington boots and overshoes. Better be quick: I mustn't keep him waiting too long.

My father was a tall, slender, handsome man. He moved about quietly, was very soft spoken, and had a verbal facility with which he could thrust and parry with ease. He had little patience, especially with anyone who "didn't have the sense they were born with." He had no time for dallying and "if a job is worth doing, it's worth doing properly" was one of his constant phrases, spoken in a knife-edged quiet voice. If a job had to be done, it had to be done now; this instant.

He was also a man with an insatiable curiosity. This intellectual bent was contrasted with his love to tinker, as Mother used to say rather disparagingly. If anything broke he would fix it. Whether this is the grandfather clock, the old car, a doll, or Mother's sewing machine, Father would fix it. On Friday night we each brought our shoes into the kitchen. Father would examine them carefully. If all they needed were a cleaning and polishing, they would stay in the kitchen overnight. Those in need of repair were taken out to the washhouse where he would lift the old shoe last from the shelf, open his box of assorted cobbler's tools, and after fitting the frayed shoes on the last he would painstakingly remove soles, stick on new ones, and, with a strangely shaped hammer, drive small nails into the shoes to hold them together for yet another month or so.

We later collected our mended and now splendidly polished shoes. My sister and I had to place our shoes at the foot of the stairs, and the first one to go upstairs was to take the shoes with her. Trouble abounded for my sister and me when we ignored this rule, for laziness or forgetfulness was not tolerated. And if Father had the slightest notion that this might have been an act of disobedience there could be instant punishment. Anarchy was not tolerated.

Years later, as a sixteen year old earning my first paycheck, I bought a pair of shoes. They were blue, high heeled and had long pointed toes. I remember holding them in front of my father, gently swinging them, flaunting them. I asked whether he liked my new shoes, and could he guess how much they cost? I don't remember his expression. I know he

didn't want to guess their price, but finally did. The price quoted was ridiculously low, for Mother protected Father from the painful facts of household expenditure: it was a small victory. During the next twenty years I bought shoes only when I had to. The purchases and wearing of them gave me little pleasure.

So when my husband asked what it was about me and shoes, he touched upon a part of my life that had been deeply buried. That day I realized that shoes symbolized my lack of status and power within the family, and I recognized my father's strict rules and yet tender rituals surrounding shoes.

Eventually my father and I became good friends, and if he were alive today I would ask him what significance shoes held for him. As for me, I no longer become enraged when shoes are left lying about; I anticipate the owners will eventually pick them up. And I have lots of shoes. I enjoy shoe shopping. Shoes are special.

Hayley Raynes

My Cup of Water

My cup of water has grown warm from sitting in the sun. When I first brought it outside with me it was cold with clear chunks of ice in it. I sat for a while under a tree in wet grass crunching the ice and reading my book. Now there is no ice left. It is tepid and there is a small gnat drowned on the surface. There are also a couple of unrecognizable black dots floating around in it. I don't know how they get there, but unrecognizable black dots always find their way into my water when I take it outside.

I could throw my water away. Dumping the cup into the trashcan, the water would spill out, evading greasy potato chip bags and soaking into discarded fruit rinds. Then my water would be gone, spread out amongst other discards. I want to keep my water though. There are so many things I could do with it, it would be a shame to get rid of it without finding a more respectable means of treatment. After all, this water was there for me when I was thirsty. It sat in my cup ready to nourish my body whenever I wanted it to.

The grass I am sitting on is wet. It already drank its fill of water for the day. If I poured my water on it, it would sit in soil already rich in nutrients and moisture. It would end up hanging out with all of the other water that did not get used. That would be a waste of my water's time. Maybe I will wait for a drought and take this cup of tepid water out into the desert. I'll pour it on a baby Joshua tree and save its life. The water will be buried in the dry cracked dirt, but then it will be sucked up by the new life. Instead of living in discarded rotting fruit, or milling around the lawn, my water will be sheltered and cooled in the green veins that grow and flourish. That would be good.

If I cannot make it out to the desert, I just might take my cup of water to church. I can have the priest bless the liquid and make it holy water. The black gnat will become a blessed gnat. Then I could pour my water into a lake. It would spread through the larger mass, making it a holy lake. When the throngs of people attend the lake in the summer they will be swimming in holy water and be blessed. They, of course, won't know that they are swimming in holy water, but when the water seeps into the pores of their skin, their bodies will rejoice in its cooling and will be happy. They will bring that water back to their homes in their

towels and bathing suits. It will go into the washing machine with the rest of their clothes, and make all of the clothes holy. All of the people will wear pants, socks and shirts warm and fresh from the dryer, and be thankful that they are so well taken care of. Someday they will get rid of those clothes. Before they throw them away, maybe they will try to think of a better end to such loyal companions.

I could do all of these things with my tepid cup of water. I think of doing all of these things. I will not do all of these things. I will only do one of these things. I am late to work, I have to grocery shop, I have to go to the bank. I will throw my cup of water away.

Orange Street

All I remembered of my great-grandparents was meeting them once when I was six and my mother took me to visit them at the store they owned on Orange Street. The store was a small market which had lessened in necessity over the years as supermarkets rose up in the neighborhood. It was still a favorite place for the neighbors on Orange Street; not so much for the products sold there as for the kind-hearted old couple that everyone called Mama and Papa. I was afraid of Mama Luna because she held a box to her throat when she talked and she sounded like a robot. My mother explained to me that she had no voice box of her own and that she used the little plastic box to make noises in her throat. I did not want to take the popsicle that she held out to me. I didn't remember Papa at all. In my memory, he was just a small old man standing next to his small old wife with the robot voice. My mother and I never went to their house, or to the houses of my tíos, who all lived there on Orange Street.

One of my cousins spoke of how Papa walked her to school every day when she was a little girl, giving her words of encouragement, advice, and love in those ten minutes of special time they shared every morning. I felt the emptiness rise up inside me, mourning for the great-grandfather that never walked me to school. I wanted to be that little girl. I wanted to live on Papa's street, and play with all my cousins, and grow up with the Luna family.

After the memorial service, I visited Orange Street for the second time in my life. We went to Tío Raul and Tía Teri's house to celebrate death the Mexican way. I tried to remember all the new faces I met and the personalities that went with them. During the drive home, I would have to ask my mom to explain how each of them was related to us. At dinner, I sat by my mother's cousin Raul, who revealed to me the reason for my whiteness: I was a "west sider."

When my mother was a young girl, the second oldest in a family that would grow to include seven children, my grandpa G. moved his family to the west side of town, out of the barrio and away from Mama, Papa, and my grandma's three sisters, the women I call my tias. Although they lived on the other side of town, the Godinez family and the Lunas remained close for many years. Their children were in the same classes all the way through high school. My mother grew up playing with her

cousins and eating in her tias' kitchens.

Slowly, the geographical distance caused a division among the family, more cultural than physical. My grandfather moved his family away from Orange Street because he wanted his children to live in a world with more opportunities than the barrio could provide. The Godinez children grew up in the world of white men's opportunities, assimilating to their culture and their ideas of success, and thinking that being Mexican was a disadvantage. As they grew up, they forgot their Spanish, their ties to the Luna Family and their own Mexican heritage.

The Godinez children grew up to be successful adults, each in a different city, and each married to an Anglo. My mother married two Anglos. First there was my father, Greg Taylor, a tall, blonde man from the San Fernando Valley. He used to sing Van Morrison's "Brown-Eyed Girl" for my mother, his Mexican beauty. Now he sings it for me. Despite leaving my mother, he will love her until the day he dies. Then, when I was eleven, my mother married Gary Wiles, a dark-haired man, but white all the same.

I don't think my mother has considered herself to be Mexican since her childhood years on Orange Street, many years before I was born. I grew up in a white neighborhood, with white friends, eating Mexican food from Taco Bell. Perhaps subconsciously, my mother taught me that being Mexican was something to deny, to cover up. I heard her talking to adults about the Mexicans in our community, who did not learn English, came here illegally from Mexico to take our jobs, or dressed funny and had tacky furniture in their multiple-family homes. I remember looking at her and wondering how she could make those generalizations about her own people, not realizing that she was Mexican too. I, a little white girl in her Levi's jeans, resented my mother's stereotypes. I wanted to fight back against those prejudices, to argue that a person could be Mexican and successful at the same time.

That was my first sense of pride for the Mexican culture I had been denied. Along with that pride came feelings of shame and sorrow for the loss of my heritage. When I told people that I was Mexican they looked at me incredulously, like it was impossible for someone like me to be Mexican. I was actually denied a scholarship because of my white girl's last name. When I requested an application to the scholarship, the reply I received in my self-addressed, stamped envelope was a strip of paper three inches wide, which stated the eligibility requirements. Requirement number two was circled and underlined three times: of Latino Heritage. I wrote back to the scholarship committee that I was of Latino heritage and to please send me an application. Again, I received

a paper with requirement number two underlined. For the third and last time, I wrote to the committee, telling them that I had never been so offended and that they should not judge my ethnicity or anything else by my last name. Needless to say, I did not apply for the scholarship after all. It was the Vikki Carr Scholarship. Carr is not a Latino name.

I disillusioned myself into believing that I could be Mexican if I worked very hard at it. I had white skin, whiter than my blonde friends did even in the summer time. I worked all summer, every summer to get a tan. I got burnt, peeled and, two days later turned white again. I didn't learn to eat salsa until high school, and then only because I was tired of people calling me a generic Mexican. I still don't like the chunks of vegetables, but enjoy the taste of the juice that I let soak into the tortilla chip. In high school I also learned to speak Spanish. I was proud of the fact that the language and pronunciation came so easily to me, thinking that it must be something in my blood. My pride was shattered when I went to visit my grandparents and was immediately lost in their natural, eloquent stream of Spanish words. I smiled as if I knew what they were saying, trying to answer their questions. I was too ashamed to tell them that I couldn't understand them. At that point, I knew that my quest to become Mexican was futile.

Last fall I moved into the dorms of Mount St. Mary's College, my home for the next four years. Because it was a women's college and because it was Catholic, there were many women of color there, especially Latinas. I looked forward to making Latina friends; women with blood like my own running through their veins. In my excitement to discover and embrace my lost culture, I rushed to join Latinas Unidas, one of the several cultural clubs on our campus. During the first meeting, all the women introduced themselves, giving their names, their majors, and what ethnicity they were. When it came to my turn, I had to say, "My name is Jessica Taylor," and to explain why a girl with the surname Taylor was at a Latina meeting I said, "and I'm half-Mexican and half-white." Many of the girls called themselves "Chicanas" and I was too embarrassed because I knew I was the only one in the room who didn't know what Chicana meant. What country were Chicanas from? Still, I wanted to be involved in the club and learn all about the Latina cultures that were represented by these women. I volunteered to be the public relations assistant, a glorified title for a poster-maker. Although I was a part of the executive board, none of the other officers or members talked to me or even recognized me when we passed in the halls at school. I tried to participate in club events, but knew I was on the outside. The

girls talked about parties and salsa dancing, Mexican Independence Day and carnitas, enjoying their inclusion in the Mexican crowd. I sensed very quickly that having only half-Mexican blood was not enough.

I was once again a white girl, an angry white girl. I was angry with the girls from Latinas Unidas, but angrier with my mother and my grandparents for depriving me of the culture that I could never regain. To be Mexican, one had to come from the barrio, learn to speak Spanish before English, live near one's grandparents, aunts and uncles, and eat foods like carne asada, tamales, and mole. And what was wrong with those things? Why were those things to move away from, to cover up and deny? It was possible to come from the barrio and be successful, as the Latinas at my college clearly demonstrated. Emily, one of the Orange Street cousins I met at Papa's memorial service, was on a full scholarship to USC and preparing to go to graduate school and become a lawyer. Her younger brother, David Raul, couldn't attend the service because he was a freshman in college, like me, and away at school. Actually, he had a full scholarship at MIT, one of the most prestigious universities in our country, and could not miss school to fly home for the service.

David's father gave me his email address at MIT and told me it would be wonderful if I wrote to him and introduced myself. I did so immediately. The excitement of meeting a new cousin and possible friend outweighed the awkwardness of writing to a complete stranger, hoping he didn't think I was a psychotic killer. The introductory letter was awkward, with me tying to explain how he and I were related and that I would really like to get to know him without sounding desperate or mentally unbalanced. David wrote back to me, hesitantly I think, and said it was nice to hear from me and "how were Tío Fernando and Tía Carolina?" He wrote me one or two more letters over the next few weeks, and I never heard from him again. It was too hard to build a family bond with someone he'd never heard of.

For my own benefit, I was raised without my Mexican heritage so that I could be successful, and empty. I was denied the walk to school with my Papa so that I could have the important things in my white life. I got the important things, like the divorced parents, the abusive stepfather, the "too quick to the sheets" boyfriend. In spite of those obstacles, I graduated high school with a 4.17 GPA, and even had time to be a cheerleader. I received a full-tuition scholarship to my first-choice college, where my GPA was 3.99 at the end of my first year. I accomplished almost as much as my Orange Street cousins, but on my own, without my family or group to identify with. I had nothing to go along with my success, no one to share it with, no one to be proud of me except my parents.

So, who was better off: me, with my scholastic success, or my cousins from the barrio, with their scholastic success, family, pride, self-worth, and identity?

In all my frantic, frustrated searching, I did not discover my identity. While I was certain that I was not raised in the Mexican culture, I didn't know how to define the culture I was raised in. What was white culture anyway, especially white American culture, besides a mixture of every other culture in the country? The only things I categorically identified with the white American culture were hot dogs, fireworks, capitalism, and an obsession with personal independence. There was no specific white history (except for the common theme of domination and subjugation), no particular set of religious beliefs, family values or moral codes. While I loved hot dogs, I knew I wasn't exactly raised in this culture either. I could only define my culture by my personal experience, and perhaps, after all was said and done, that's how it was for everyone. Perhaps culture didn't go beyond one's family. Even so, if family defined one's culture, I was still lost because I did not know my family. I couldn't connect my culture, what jumbled list of identities I could uncover, with anyone else's.

While I couldn't describe white culture, I did have a sense of what Mexican culture involved from my observations of others' families and what I read in books. I knew that Mexican families were very close, not in the stereotypical way my mother had taught me, but in the way the Lunas were close. I knew that Mexicans appreciated life's simplicities, but that they were not simple-minded. I knew that Mexicans had a different spirituality than white people, seeing God and magic as one in the same and present in all things in the world. What I most admired was the Mexican value of community, of confidence and strength as a member of a family or group, instead of the white insistence on individual strength, the disdain for needing someone else in one's universe. Wouldn't my life be complete if I had someone to walk with me through this world?

I was yearning for something that had been missing in my life, more than just a label for myself or a bubble to fill in on standardized tests. I was searching not just for myself, but for something bigger than myself that I could connect to. I found it in the beautiful, poetic writing of such authors as Gabriel García Márquez and Isabel Allende. These Latino authors wrote differently than the Anglo authors I read, with immensely rich language and powerful images. They wrote of their countries' magnificent and not always glorious histories, described their land-

scapes in such a way that my heart ached to be there, a young senorita with smooth, brown skin, living in an 18th-century pueblo. The characters of One Hundred Years of Solitude and Love in the Time of Cholera came alive in my mind and my soul as I read the stories of their lives, their passions and ambitions, their triumphs and tragedies. The magic and mysticism that García Márquez wove into his stories enchanted me. I embraced his view of nature as my own, thrilled by the idea of a rain of yellow butterflies in my bathroom.

These novels gave me what I had always desired--a place of my own in the Latino world and a pride I had never felt before. When I read them, I didn't read of a strange culture I had never experienced, but lived the history of my people- my people. I was no longer trying to be Mexican, participating in too many events in order to feel like I belonged. I belonged. The Mexican heritage was mine. My dark blood boiled up and broke loose inside me. I didn't have to be ashamed of my whiteness. I still didn't know what a Chicana or carnitas were, but it no longer mattered. I didn't have to know Mexican trivia facts in order to call myself Mexican. My pride was in my blood in the history of my family and the beauty of our lives, even mine.

The Sun Will Set Once Again

I couldn't sleep again. The sound of the gunshots ran through my head all night. I couldn't get the picture of Ulyses dying out of my system. My family doesn't seem to cope with this murder the same way I was, but for once in the household there was a sense of tranquility and peace. Ironically, it was after the murder of Ulyses.

He wasn't such a bad person. He had just grown into what this society expected him to be, a gangster. His presence in the house caused utter chaos, but he was still a member of the family and was welcomed.

Ulyses Montes was a distant cousin of mine. He was born and raised in the bad minorities' neighborhood. "The project es mi turf," he would tell me after I urged him to move out. "Mitzie, would a turtle leave his shell and walk the land unprotected?" He asked, "No, of course not," I responded. "Well, if I leave my raza and my home, then I'll leave unprotected." I never urged him to leave his home after that. But he and I knew that his presence in the neighborhood was unwelcome and dangerous. Still, he stayed.

After the sunset, I was getting prepared to go to bed. Every afternoon I would stand in front of my house to try to see the sunset through the LA smog. One afternoon I arrived home late and missed the sunset. The curtains were closed, the television was on, and dinner was being served. I sat on the sofa to relax after a long day at school. I heard a shower of firecrackers from about two houses away. I didn't pay much attention to it because children often pop firecrackers at night. Three minutes later I heard my next door neighbor running and screaming to the street. "Llamen a la policía!" she screamed in terror, "Call the cops!" I put a coat and slippers on and walked slowly to the front gate to see what the huddle of people on the sidewalk were staring at. As my family and I approached the huddle, the people saw us and moved to give us the full view. Ulyses was lying there, lifeless and bleeding. My mother and father ran to him. I just stood there. I knew he was going to die, but I didn't want to see it. The car sirens from the police grew louder and everyone moved away to let the paramedics get to the body. As he was carried to the ambulance, my parents ran to the car to follow it to the hospital. "Come on!" screamed my father as I stood there. I got in the car and we sped away. When my parents and I arrived at the hospital we

went to the emergency room. My parents and I were told to sit and wait. Still in shock, I sat in the waiting room thinking of the pain my cousin was suffering. Was he going to visit our house and get shot on the way? Did he feel the shots as we've seen in the movies? One hour later a nurse asked us to go into a private room because the doctor wanted to talk to us. I then realized that Ulyses was in fact dead. I couldn't bear being told so I stepped outside to just relax and be on my own. I went outside and just stared and counted the stars to forget what had just happened.

"Mitzie, they want to talk to us," my father called me. I entered and sat patiently. "Good evening," said a new just-out-of-graduate-school doctor. As he sat and babbled on about the shots, I wandered off in my daydreams. It was 10:30p.m. when I finally heard, "he's braindead, the machines are breathing for him." I wept.

The doctor led us to his room. I heard the beeping of the machines, the fluorescent lights shining dimly, and Ulyses breathing with a tube in his mouth. After that I didn't hear much. I stood next to the bed. It wasn't Ulyses. It was the shell of the turtle. The turtle had wandered off. I grabbed his hand and kissed it. "I'll miss you." I never saw Ulyses again. Later that week a closed casket funeral was arranged. I sat in the law row.

My daddy threw me into therapy. He said it was good for me. I went to therapy for three months, but it didn't help. In time, I have learned to heal my own wounds, but I no longer see the sunset. I make sure that I don't watch the sunset; instead, I close the curtains tightly half an hour early. I think to myself, "What if I were in front of the house, watching the sunset, and saw him get killed?" For now I'm learning to cope with his death. But I pray that perhaps one of these days I can see the sunset once again. To begin life anew.

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